

IAM Readers Guild  
*The Pleasures & Sorrows of Work*  
by Alain de Botton

1. How does the section on cargo shippers and the men who watch the pier in London inform de Botton's tactics throughout the book? How is the average person alike/different from them in their consumption habits?
2. In the "biscuits" section, he writes, "When does a job feel meaningful?" He answers "Whenever it allows us to generate delight or reduce suffering in others." Do you agree with this? And, what of the changes in job titles? How was the affected by the division of labor?
3. Seventeenth century painters documented the artists documented the skills of domestic servants, "honoring in particular the scrubbing of kitchens and courtyards, privileging such activities over more conventionally prestigious biblical subjects." What does this say about how we establish value in certain work?
4. Do you think de Botton thinks a truly meritocratic society is possible? Discuss specific instances in the book where people's rank may not have been determined by their ability. Discuss his views on egalitarianism with examples in the book.
5. Overall, did you think de Botton gave a fair evaluation of the modern work place? At the end of the first section, de Botton writes, "I was inspired by the men at the pier to attempt a hymn to the intelligence, peculiarity, beauty, and horror of the modern workplace and, not least, its extraordinary claim to be able to provide us, alongside love, with the principal source of life's meaning." Is de Botton persuasive in his technique to get us to reevaluate how we see work?