



Advanced | Exemplar Essay

## Angela's Ashes

### No Matter the Cost of the Journey



#### Claim and Focus

An engaging hook and relevant context narrow to a clear claim about the techniques the authors used to convey the messages of the texts ("Facing the challenges...with the specific events, character development, and setting of the stories"). The demands of the prompt are thoroughly met as the focus on developing this claim is maintained throughout the whole essay.



#### Analysis and Evidence

The essay presents the most appropriate examples from each text to support the claim and each detail is balanced with thorough explanation and analysis of each author's strategy ("This host of unfriendly, enemy-like army of adults help to establish a mood of...", "Petry instead personifies the November wind and compares it to the struggles of life").



#### Organization

The organizational structure enhances the analysis, as evidence is grouped into paragraphs that present how the events of plot, the character development, and the setting work to develop the theme of each story. Effective, varied transitions are used to show the relationships between ("because," "due to") and among ideas ("In *The Street*, a very different spectacle is set").



#### Language and Style

A formal style and objective tone are established and maintained throughout the essay. Vocabulary is consistently domain-specific ("protagonists," "mood," "personifies") and precise ("elucidated," "antagonistic," "exemplified"), and sentence structure is appropriately varied.



#### Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait 'looks like' in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see "25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays" by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

## Angela's Ashes



### No Matter the Cost of the Journey

Determination, a fixed purpose or intention; willpower, persistence, perseverance.

The story *Angela's Ashes*, by Frank McCourt, and *The Street*, by Ann Petry, are two stories that express the mindset of perseverance. *Angela's Ashes* is a memoir from 1996 that describes the life of the author Frank McCourt growing up in Limerick, Ireland. *The Street* is a novel that emphasizes the struggles of African-Americans in 1940's New York City. Facing the challenges of these two harsh environments requires perseverance. This idea is explored and elucidated in both texts in a variety of ways, notably with the specific events, character development, and setting of the stories.

The authors use events in the stories to drive the plot and actively demonstrate the harsh conditions the protagonists endure. In *Angela's Ashes*, the mother is sick, and instead of helping the children, she has them help her, demanding lemonade and paying no mind to the children's hunger or other needs. McCourt finds himself stuck between a rock and a hard place. He decides to go out in search for food in the cold. When he comes across Kathleen O'Connell's shop and a bread delivery van outside, he contemplates stealing food from the shop. He thinks better of it at first because he knows it is the wrong thing to do, but he decides that the risk is worth taking, due to his unfortunate circumstances. He says in the fifth paragraph, "It's wrong to steal from Kathleen with the way she's always good to us, but if I go in and ask her for bread she'll be annoyed and tell me I'm ruining her morning cup of tea... It's easier to stick the bread and lemonade under my jersey with the lemonade and promise to tell everything in confession." Reading through the memoir, it becomes evident that he must face life choices where he has to do decide on the right thing to get by. The stealing of the food

and lemonade, the creeping through the streets like criminals avoiding the constable, and the general distaste the children see from the majority of the adults, are events that demonstrate the kids' survival of hardship through whatever means necessary.

In *The Street*, the events of Lutie braving the storm while walking down the street, and, at the end, finding a safe place for lodging, demonstrate the theme by showing that Lutie was willing to endure all trouble: wind, rain, and swirling dust and garbage, so that she could reach her destination. To make Lutie Johnson stand out, the author sets her up as virtually the only pedestrian in the storm, a feat only she and sparse amounts of other walkers could face, as none were out but "a few hurried pedestrians who bent double in an effort to offer the least possible exposed surface to [the storm's] violent assault". She was focused on finding reasonable lodging, showing her ability and determination to do whatever was called upon her to arrive at her goal.

In *Angela's Ashes*, McCourt develops the characters by immediately separating children from adults. The narrator's father is gone, northward, leaving the family far behind, while the grandparents are hostile, and the Guard Dennehy is terrifyingly hostile, as well as the school teacher. Even the mother seems antagonistic and unfriendly, whining for her children's help, instead of doing things for herself. This host of unfriendly, enemy-like army of adults help to establish a mood of everything being stacked against the children, and having to rebel and resort to criminal activity to survive. The narrator even has to steal from the one pleasant-sounding, kind adult in the story to feed his family.

In *The Street*, a very different spectacle is set. To establish an unkind environment, the author uses not unfriendly characters, but the absence of side characters at all. Petry instead personifies the November wind and compares it to the struggles of life. The author uses the wind to show how difficult it is to live in a world that seems to be throwing things your way--a world that never seems to be going the same way as you. The wind was exemplified as this force of nature that no one could avoid. She

states, "It did everything it could to discourage the people walking along the street."

Lutie Johnson, the main character of the story, was forced to push through this harsh November wind in order to find a place to stay. Petry describes the wind by saying, "It wrapped newspaper around their feet entangling them until the people cursed deep in their throats, stamped their feet, kicked at the paper." Like Frank McCourt, Lutie Johnson struggled with poverty too, but she couldn't let it stop her from getting where she needed to go. She had to continue walking through the wind because if she stopped, it would only push her back. Although persevering was a struggle for her, she knew she had to do it, not just for herself but for her children, too.

In the end, we can see that every element of both stories demonstrates the theme of perseverance through hardship to survive, at whatever cost. In *Angela's Ashes*, we notice the hostile adults, the need and quest for food, and the unfriendly town. In *The Street*, we recognize the lack of characters (besides Lutie), and her determined search for suitable shelter in an unfriendly, harsh storm. The characters, events, and settings succeed in both stories in building a literary work that demonstrates a common theme: working through harsh, unpleasant, antagonistic conditions to survive or reach your goal, no matter the cost of the journey.