



Proficient | Exemplar Essay

Angela's Ashes

Persevering through Challenges



Claim and Focus

The essay states a clear claim in the introduction about the strategies used to develop the common theme ("Both authors establish the similar theme of hardships faced by families in poverty and their perseverance through the use of characters, events, and settings").



Analysis and Evidence

Appropriate examples from each text are balanced with analysis of the authors' techniques. Some reasoning is offered ("Both passages are about how there will be times when we are powerless, but in that powerlessness, we find a way to move forward"), but further development would move this essay to a 4.



Organization

Purposeful organization of ideas is employed as the essay presents evidence for each story separately, then unifies them with a final body paragraph analyzing the common theme. Transitions effectively structure ideas but do not necessarily enhance the analysis ("The author of *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt, portrays," "In *The Street*," "Together, the two passages convey").



Language and Style

Vocabulary is domain-specific ("characters, events, and settings," "...portray the theme") and precise ("bedridden," "economical circumstances," "inconveniencing," "powerlessness," "persistence") in a way that addresses the complexity of the topic. Sentence structure is mostly varied, and a formal style and objective tone are maintained throughout.



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

Persevering through Challenges

In *Angela's Ashes*, by Frank McCourt, and *The Street*, by Ann Petry, both authors center around how facing the challenges of harsh environments can require perseverance. The excerpts from *Angela's Ashes* and *The Street* both give a glimpse into the life of an impoverished person. *Angela's Ashes* describes the life of a poor boy from Ireland and *The Street* is about a poor, black, single mother living in the 1940's in New York. Both authors establish the similar theme of hardships faced by families in poverty and their perseverance through the use of characters, events, and settings.

The author of *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt, portrays this theme through the main character, (himself) in the memoir. McCourt faces many challenges growing up. The passage focuses on how his mother is bedridden and his father is far away because of work, so he and his three brothers find themselves in a state of need not being able to provide for themselves due to the circumstances. McCourt is forced to resort to staying home from school and stealing food so he and his family won't starve. McCourt becomes the provider and perseveres through the tough times by doing what is necessary to get by. "I put on my shoes and run quickly through the streets of Limerick to keep myself warm against the February Frost." (Mccourt Paragraph 3) It was a cold month, but Frank knew that he had to get the food for his family. Sometimes you have to face the hardship of the February frost to do what you have to do to survive.

In *The Street*, by Ann Petry, instead of using poor social and economical circumstances to portray the theme, Petry uses the wind as a way to represent the difficult challenge that the characters are facing. In their environment, the

wind is a burden that goes on to irritate everyone in the city. However, the people are forced to continue with their daily lives, like the character Lutie Johnson, who was looking at housing while harsh wind was surrounding her. Lutie accepts the circumstances and carries on, "The wind lifted Lutie Johnson's hair away from her neck so that she suddenly felt naked and bald, for her hair had been resting softly and warmly against her skin," (Petty Paragraph 3). Lutie and the wind are conflicting forces and their interaction is a discomfort to Lutie. Lutie can't stop it, so she continues to live with the wind as all the other people in the city do.

Together, the two passages convey that facing the challenges of a harsh environment must require perseverance. In *Angela's Ashes*, these challenges are shaped through the people surrounding McCourt. For a young boy, he finds less and less people willing to assist his family and finds the burden shouldered on himself alone. "We don't laugh long, there is no more bread and we're hungry, the four of us. We can get no more credit at O'Connell's shop. We can't go near Grandma, either. She yells at us all the time because Dad is from the North and he never sends money home from England where he is working in a munitions factory. Grandma says we could starve to death for all he cares." (Mccourt Paragraph 3). In *The Street*, the wind serves as the challenge due to its power inconveniencing and irritating everyone, but due to the fact that they know it's impossible to control the weather, they deal with the circumstances. Both passages are about how there will be times when we are powerless, but in that powerlessness, we find a way to move forward.

Perseverance is not giving up. It is persistence; the effort required to do something and keep doing it regardless if it is hard. In *Angela's Ashes* and *The Street*, Frank McCourt and Lutie Johnson are both put in difficult situations, but show tenacity for their family. In both passages, the author uses character, events and setting to show how facing the challenges of poverty and harsh environments requires perseverance.