

# Compare & Contrast Sample Essay 2: The Folly of Self Help

The Writing Center at North Park University (Internal Version)  
-Fall 2005

NOTE: You should see colored comment boxes on the side of the essay. If these do not appear, go to the **toolbar**, click **view** and then **comment**.

The best way to read commentary on essays is to begin at the end, because the last comment seeks to sum up the most important strengths and weaknesses of the paper. It gives you a perspective from which to read the more specific comments in the margins.

## The Folly of Self Help

O'Connor's *Revelation* is filled with many strong willed people. This, however, is a serious problem when it comes to educating Mrs. Turpin about her incorrect mindset. Mrs. Turpin like so think to herself; she thinks about how great it is to be in her position and she is thankful. But no amount of her own self-assessment can break her out of her ignorance because she just makes herself more strong willed. The key to education is both O'Connor's *Revelation* and in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* is other people. Through other people, not one's own justification, can someone truly see clearly.

Mrs. Turpin is above most everybody in the doctor's office. The other people that she sees in it include some white-trash people, some common people, and some old people. The only person whom Mrs. Turpin shows any regards towards is the pleasant lady, who is the girl's mother. Much of the time she spends in the doctor's is spent ridiculing the white-trash lady and Negroes both verbally and in her head. To her, status was everything. She even spends her nights contemplating status so she can fall asleep. Like other characters in other writings of O'Connor, Mrs. Turpin's "perception of the world is controlled by...limited powers of sight, (Maida, 31)." One example of this is

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM

**Comment:** Phrasing. Watch your phrasing always, and especially in the first few lines of any essay. Your title and opening statements seem a little unconnected – are there words that could better exemplify your points and tie the title into the paper sooner?

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM

**Comment:** Could you make this sentence a little less redundant? You might try reading it aloud.

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM

**Comment:** I can understand the point you want to make, though the thesis would be stronger if you phrased it more directly. You've found a nicely restricted topic to investigate.

Administrator 6/28/09 1:43 PM

**Comment:** Or at least, *she* thinks she is.

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM

**Comment:** Do you really need to use the word 'people' four times in this sentence? Repetition for stylistic purposes is a valid choice, but could you cut some of the repetition and wind up with a more forceful sentence? It might be a good idea to clarify that these terms are ones Mrs. Turpin used.

Administrator 6/28/09 1:43 PM

**Comment:** What girl?

Administrator 6/28/09 1:43 PM

**Comment:** You're supplying good supporting detail.

Administrator 6/28/09 1:43 PM

**Comment:** Quotation marks enclose only the quotation, *not* the citation.

that she sees herself as a saint who always tries to help the less fortunate, when in reality, she is always judgmental of others. We are given reason to believe, early on in the story, that what Mrs. Turpin perceives as worthwhile and important, really counts for nothing. This is shown after she describes her nights trying to fall asleep and she contemplates race. “Usually by the time she had fallen asleep all the classes of people were moiling in roiling around in her head, and she would dream they were all crammed in together in a box car, being ridden off to be put in a gas oven,” (O’Connor, 196). Her notions about the importance of status are shown to be faulty because at the end we are all headed to the same ends of death, and it doesn’t matter what status you are, because that can’t save you.

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** Your phrasing here seems to indicate a shift in topic ... do you mean to continue with the same paragraph, or are you opening a new idea?

Mrs. Turpin, though she likes to think of herself a lot, cannot think herself out of being judgmental and stereotypical of class. In fact, she is quite unwilling to recognize that she has a problem. In Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*, people who had left the cave and had seen the sun try to go back into the cave to show the people who are still bound, the light. In *Revelation*, the person to lead Mrs. Turpin out of the cave of her ignorance is Mary Grace. Also in the allegory, when someone is brought into the light, they look back at what used to be familiar and realize that it is not quite so familiar after all. In this case, what used to be familiar is her judgment towards other classes of people, or More specifically for her, the white trash lady and her Negro servant. Since she is unable to bring herself out of her own rut of arrogance, other people are necessary to educate her.

Administrator 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** Here you seem to shift person several times – why? Unless you’ve got a good and specific reason, always, always ... always ... write from the same person.

Administrator 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** I like the stylistic repetition of “think” here, and I appreciate the complex sentence structure. Somewhere in here, it would be helpful to have a bit of lead-in to Plato, to explain the common ground between the 2 stories. Here, the “Cave” simply appears in a paragraph I expect to be about Mrs. Turpin’s inability to find her way out.

Administrator 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** The point-by-point comparison in this paragraph is a bit choppy: maybe less tilted lead-ins (such as “Also in the allegory...”) would minimize this effect. Or combining points would work.

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** Again, using words twice is not needed.

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** This sentence summarizes well what the paragraph is about and helps to draw the separate ideas together. Technically, I suppose it would be accurate to say that something else could educate her—it’s inside of this story, as a part of O’Connor’s main thrust, that “other people are necessary”

We learn from Mary Grace’s mother that Mary Grace is being educated in the north. She has been exposed to the light, or the knowledge that racism and self-glorification due to status is pointless and detrimental. Plato has much to say about a

cmartin 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** What about a bit more bridge? You might simply open with something like “Mary Grace is one of these necessary people.”

person who sees the light and is returning back to the cave, who is Mary Grace in this case. He says that, “You must not wonder that those who attain to this beatific vision are unwilling to descend to human affairs,” (Plato, 4). He also questions if “there is anything surprising in one who passes from divine contemplations to the evil state of man, misbehaving himself (or herself) in a ridiculous manner,” (Plato, 4). Mary Grace’s attack on Mrs. Turpin seems more understandable when looked through Plato’s eyes. It is not enough to know the truth, “we have to try to make somebody else see what we see, because then if we get a whole bunch of people realizing something is wrong and has to be changed, then we can take action,” (Miller, 1). This wasn’t just necessary for Mary Grace, it was necessary for Mrs. Turpin. Mrs. Turpin was so completely unwilling to think that she was wrong about class that it took a smack from a book to get her to even think about it.

Patricia Maida, in a publication about Flannery O’Connor, describes the scene in which Mary Grace throws the book at Mrs. Turpin superbly. Mrs. Turpin started to see the big picture after getting hit and when she looked to Mary Grace for answers, she was told that she was a wart hog from hell (Maida, 35). Mrs. Turpin was really rattled by these words; she didn’t want to think that she was a wart hog from hell. After hearing the message and not wanting to believe it, Mrs. Turpin looked up when she was on the ground and she sees the white trash lady who is now raving about the Mary Grace being a lunatic. Mrs. Turpin would have been horribly annoyed by the white trash lady’s insistence to talk, but she was too numb in her head to talk back to her. And when she later goes home, she tells the Negro workers about her day at the doctor’s office. All of the workers were kind, interested, and caring of Mrs. Turpin, and because of this, Mrs.

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** The phrasing is a little rough here; can you smooth it out?

cmartin 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** You’ve found really fitting sources to help you make your points. Just a little advice on working them into your paper more fully: Don’t be afraid to comment on them a little. They *shouldn’t* stand off alone but should be *integrated* into your points. (In an academic essay, *you* are the authority direction the argument, not a beginner deferring to others. It’s *your* argument). Here, specifically, you might pause after the first quote to comment on M.G.’s *ridiculous misbehavior* which seems so inexplicable at first. *Tie* your quotation into your commentary, and *both* will gain in clarity and grace.

Administrator 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** Can you clarify this point with a bit more detail?

Administrator 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** Ah—precisely the people she had criticized most sharply before are the ones who help her now. Was this highlight of *who* she heard your realization or Maida’s? (If it’s hers, it needs to be acknowledged by a citation). Whichever it was, it’s a *great* idea.

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** Proofread, please . . . It would be a good idea to read your work aloud and listen to yourself. If you find this tedious or can’t hear awkward spots, there’s no rule against asking a friend to read your paper out loud to you while you follow along with a pencil.

Turpin stormed off. Through the white trash lady and the Negro workers, she was able to see what her mindset was before Mary Grace brought her out of the cave and how wrong it was. Had she only heard the message from Mary Grace but had not seen the workers and the white trash lady, she would never have changed because she wouldn't be able to see the faults inside of herself. This is why these people were necessary for Mrs. Turpin's education.

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** This is a fairly long paragraph for a rather short paper – are all of the ideas here Maida's? Or are you fusing two ideas?

After Mary Grace gave her the message and the Negro workers and the white trash lady had reconfirmed the validity of that message, she was then able to finally ask questions about the truth of the matter. With out them, she would never have begun to question her view of status and whether it was incorrect. And because she began to think and question, she eventually received a vision of the people moving into heaven, in which she was the last in line. This gave her sight of the truth, but, again, it wouldn't have been possible without other people. This is why teachers are so important; knowledge can be self-taught, but wisdom comes from others.

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** I like the way you summarize the earlier steps in this process, then move into the new stage of thinking.

Administrator 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** "Them" refers to the question or the people?

heichler 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** In these sentences you're reaching the high point of Mrs. T's story and of your argument. Could you comb out some unneeded words, so that the ideas stand out more clearly and prominently?

cmartin 6/28/09 1:43 PM  
**Comment:** You crafted your topic well, selecting a particularly good moment where O'Connor's use of Plato shows through in a particularly rich way. And you've built your argument with care to the sequence in which you present it. Your attention to sentence-level style sometimes produces some interesting rhythms, though you might diminish repetition a bit and come out with stronger, more energetic prose. The sources you use work really well; they provide relevant insights which deepen your points, and you've handled them well, too—they serve your argument, which remains dominant. We could work more deliberately on clarifying your prose, especially by cutting some unneeded words. These tend to work like camouflage; it's hard to see the ideas clearly if unneeded words hide them.

