

Extracting & Employing Evidence From Literary Nonfiction Text Sources

Allegory of the Cave — Try It Excerpt and Worksheet

Directions:

1. Read the excerpt from Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave" on the following pages.
2. As you read, identify and define any unknown words.
3. Reread the passage, underlining and marking evidence in the text that shows you words and phrases that may have a deeper meaning (such as symbols and allegories).
4. Take notes in the margins about possible meaning of the excerpt as you read.
5. When you are finished reading and annotating, complete the Try It assessment.

Excerpt 1 From Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"

Between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way and a low wall built along the way like the screen which puppet players have in front of them over which they show the puppets. Do you see men passing along the wall, carrying all sorts of articles which they hold projected above the wall? Statues of men and animals made of wood and stone and various materials? Of the objects which are being carried in like manner, they would only see the shadows, and if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

And suppose further that there was an echo which came from the wall. Would they not be sure to think when one of the passersby spoke that the voice came from the passing shadows? To them, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images. And now look again and see what will naturally follow if one of the prisoners is released. At first, when he is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his head round and look towards the light, all this would hurt him and he would be much too dazzled to see distinctly those things whose shadows he had seen before. And then conceive someone saying to him that what he saw before was an illusion. But that now when he's approaching nearer to reality and his eyes turn toward more real existence, he has a clearer vision. What will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, will he not be perplexed? Would he not think that the shadows, which he formerly saw, are truer than the objects which are now shown to him? And suppose once more that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent and held fast until he is forced into the presence of the sun itself. When he approaches the light, his eyes will be dazzled. He will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities. He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. But first he would see the shadows best, next the reflections of objects in the water, and then the objects themselves. Then he will gaze upon the stars and the spangled heavens and the light of the moon. He will see the sky and the stars by night. Last of all, he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of it in the water but he will see the sun in its own proper place and not in another.

Plato's Republic, "The Allegory of the Cave" Book VII, 514a-521b