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Professor Kim Brown

English 102

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- PLACE YOUR NAME, PROFESSOR'S NAME, COURSE, AND DATE ON THE LEFT-HAND SIDE OF THE FIRST PAGE.
- ALL PAGES HAVE 1-INCH MARGINS ALL AROUND, ARE DOUBLE-SPACED, AND USE 11 OR 12-POINT FONT SIZE.
- COME UP WITH AN INTERESTING TITLE, WHICH IS CENTERED AND PLACED HERE. (NO SEPARATE TITLE PAGE)

## A Good Man Is Hard to Find—Seriously!

A great literary work creates an imagined situation that encapsulates the reality of human experience. Literary fiction dramatizes what it means to live in the world of its characters, and while that world that may not be identical to our own, we will almost certainly recognize aspects of our own reality in it. Flannery O'Connor's short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" does just that: it takes us into rural Georgia in 1953 on a family vacation that meets with a tragic fate, mostly as a result of the actions of its main character, known only as "the grandmother," who leads the family into a den of murderers, all the while lamenting that "a good man is hard to find." The story provides us with insight into the grandmother's actions and values and their effects on the story. This story is an excellent example of a literary work because it demonstrates the hypocrisy of her religious and moral position through its approach to characterization, plot, and theme. [This last sentence of the intro paragraph is the clearly stated thesis with its claim and three warrants.]

Intro paragraph has the right amount of summary and background context.

The character of the grandmother is central to the story, and it is through characterization that we are able to see her hypocritical nature and unethical choices that lead to disaster. It is because of her manipulation, selfishness, and total lack of self-awareness that the family ends up traveling down the dirt road that leads them to the Misfit and his fellow murderers. Throughout the story, we see evidence of the grandmother's manipulation. Because she does not want to go to Florida but would prefer to visit

TOPIC SENTENCE

First body paragraph explaining how characterization of grandmother demonstrates her hypocrisy in the story

East Tennessee, we see her using two different manipulative strategies to try to persuade her son Bailey and his wife to change their travel plans. She tells Bailey that they should avoid Florida because the Misfit is “aloose from the Federal Pen,” while her strategy to persuade “the children’s mother” is to say that it would be a broadening experience for the children to visit Tennessee. As if this weren’t evidence enough of her selfishness, the grandmother also brings her cat on the road trip, even though she knows Bailey doesn’t like traveling with a cat. When the family arrives at a roadside café, the grandmother has a long conversation with its proprietor, Red Sammy Butts, about how hard it is to find “a good man,” someone as moral and trustworthy as the two of them. It’s clear that both Sammy and the grandmother see themselves as “good,” despite evidence that Red Sam is rude to his wife and that the grandmother is manipulative and selfish.

The story’s plot hinges around the elaborate chain of cause and effect set up by the grandmother’s selfish choices and hypocrisy. Two choices in particular determine the course of action that results in the story’s tragic outcomes: her decision to bring the cat on the trip, and her insistence on traveling on the dirt road that leads to the Misfit

because of her mistaken conviction that it will lead to an old plantation she recalls from her youth. Her dishonesty is manifested in both choices: she conceals the cat in a “valise” that looks like “the head of a hippopotamus,” and she manipulates Bailey into trying to find the plantation by suggesting to the children that there’s a “secret panel” in the house where the family silver was hidden during the Civil War, a lie that causes the children to start shrieking that they want to stop there. As they wind along the dirt road, the grandmother realizes that she has made a mistake and that the house she recalls is actually in Tennessee. This horrifying realization causes her to remove her feet from the valise, prompting

TOPIC SENTENCE

Second body paragraph leading off with how plot elucidates the grandmother’s hypocritical, selfish choices

This body paragraph focusing on plot needs to have some summary, but it is always tied to the analysis.

Quotations (highlighted in orange) that are taken directly from the story are well-chosen because they are in the particular style or voice of the story, which differs from the voice or tone of the student-writer. Quotations are also introduced with signal phrases, such as “he replied,” and well-integrated, for example, into the student-writer’s own statements. Every statement still maintains the student-writer’s authority, while quoted words or phrases from the story are peppered in for added effect and evidence.

the cat to spring out and jump onto Bailey's shoulder, which causes the car to flip over and land in the gulch where the Misfit and his gang find them. Every step in the chain of events that has led them to the Misfit—ironically the very possibility the grandmother has invoked to try to talk Bailey into going to Tennessee—is the result of the selfish, manipulative choices of the grandmother. [Solid restatement of topic sentence/main idea on the plot, i.e. chain of events, occurring because of the grandmother.]

When the grandmother and the Misfit finally meet, the story's theme becomes clear: in the hypocritical world of this story, it seems impossible to find a "good" man or woman. But this story's theme abounds with ironies. While the Misfit's cohorts appear sinister, the Misfit himself creates the appearance of gentility and kindness. He wears "silver-rimmed spectacles" that give him "a scholarly look," and he is soft-spoken and polite—ostensibly "good." But as we soon find out, the appearance of goodness, like the grandmother's own ladylike costume of organdy and lace, means nothing: his actions show that he is devoid of morality or compassion, and he murders the entire family without a shred of remorse. In his lack of a moral compass, we can't help seeing a reflection of the grandmother, who has lied, cheated, and manipulated to get what she wants without any regard for the other members of her family. Yet in the end, the grandmother appears to be potentially capable of the kind of change we may expect to see in a short story: as her family members are being murdered all around her, she tries to bargain for her life with the Misfit by repeatedly insisting that he is "a good man." "Nome," he replies, "I ain't a good man." As this strategy fails to work, she starts telling him to pray, saying that Jesus will help him, but he responds, "I don't want no hep." In this moment, her religious hypocrisy and manipulation are foregrounded, but when she sees that the Misfit looks like he is about to cry, she reaches out to him, saying, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" Her touch on his shoulder causes the Misfit to shoot her three times, killing her instantly. Has the

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grandmother experienced a religious conversion in which she truly feels empathy for the Misfit, or has she just said this to manipulate him? The story refuses to confirm that one way or another. [These last two statements provide clever analysis because the paragraph provides us with many examples of the grandmother's dubious behavior. Still, the analysis is based on the student-writer's interpretation, which is debatable, if other evidence were to posit a different point. For example, one could argue instead that the story proves the grandmother is beyond redemption or any empathy and that she is driven only by her own self-preservation till the end.]

In presenting the grandmother as a person with no morals who is convinced of her own goodness, O'Connor paints a picture of the hypocrisy that can lurk behind a genteel façade. The grandmother's selfishness, manipulateness, casual racism, and misguided belief in her own goodness show us that indeed, in the world of O'Connor's story, a good man is hard to find. But the story's greatness is in leading us to wonder, at least for a moment, if perhaps the grandmother was truly capable of change—and if by inference, all humans are.

#### Work Cited

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