

**Grade: English 10**

**Unit: Basics of Argumentation (Film Review)**

**Summative Assessment:**

How effective are films that intentionally focus on a social issue? After viewing *My Sister's Keeper* (or other film) and reading related texts, write a film review that discusses one social issue exposed in the film and evaluates how effectively the characters and events deal with this social issue. Be sure to support your position with evidence from the texts.

**This prompt is from the MAISA English 10 Basics of Argumentation Unit.**

*My Sister's Keeper* Film Review

Nick Cassavetes and Jeremy Leven's film on the best selling book, *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult, is drawing in all kinds of feedback in retaliation to the movie's portrayal of the novel and the portrayal of social issues. These issues being taken from the gloriously done novel were not right for the screen, or they weren't meant to be with these screenwriters. However, *My Sister's Keeper* decently shows the social issue of assisted suicide by appealing to the viewers' emotions.

This heartbreaking movie is about the struggle of Anna Fitzgerald (Abigail Breslin) suing her mother, Sara Fitzgerald (Cameron Diaz), for the right to be medically emancipated from her care (another social issue). The mother claims that it is okay that she genetically engineered Anna specifically for the care of their other daughter, Kate (Sofia Vassilieva), who is sick with leukemia and is in need of a transplant. Throughout the years with Kate's leukemia, their mother and father have been taking bone marrow, blood, etc. from Anna since she was a newborn without Anna fully understanding what's going on. At the young age of 11, Anna decides to go to a hot-shot lawyer in town (Alec Baldwin) to fight for the rights concerning her own body. However, Anna's brother, Jesse Fitzgerald (Evan Ellingson), reveals during the trial the real

**Comment [1]:** The writer credits the film's director and screen writer, as well as the novel's author.

**Comment [2]:** The writer gives the opinion that the film does not do the "gloriously done" novel and its issues justice.

**Comment [3]:** Claim: The writer will prove that the film does a decent job of presenting the issue of assisted suicide. The word "decently" could be exchanged for a stronger adverb.

reason that Anna finally decided to protest against her mother's wishes: Kate had asked Anna to refuse to donate her kidney knowing that she would die because she's finally ready to die. This leaves Judge De Salvo (Joan Cusack) the decider of whether Kate gets to die or if Sara gets to decide her medical fate because she isn't ready to let go of Kate.

The struggle of assisted suicide is represented through technical decisions of the director and screenwriters. Through the script and point of view of Anna, the screenwriters successfully get the view on the side of Anna/Kate supporting assisted suicide. Anna and Kate bounce between being main characters with flashbacks of both their lives with struggles of Kate surviving and Anna's forced donations to help her. The background of Sara and Brian Fitzgerald determining whether or not to create Anna is never explained and their side of the story never truly explained to make it easier to deem them the villains. This created an emotional edge to Kate's story by not having the other side express their feelings about the idea or being against it. Through all the flashbacks, even more evidence is given to Kate's overdue rescue into death and with Anna's donations, which weren't needed to describe the current situation since it is overly talked about throughout the movie anyway. The movie even starts out with Anna speaking on a voiceover of a montage of the family, creating an immediate connection to the character, and as the main character switches from Anna to Kate, the voiceovers become Kate's as she expresses her opinions; Sara and Brian have no voice with the audience to defend themselves.

Screenwriters shows Kate's wish for assisted suicide through the technical decisions made with choosing scenes, flashbacks, and voiceovers of Kate and Anna's voices.

One specific scene in the movie shows both sides of the assisted suicide viewpoints with Sara and Anna in the courtroom; Jesse runs into the courtroom and tells the truth about why Anna decided to sue Sara. This clears up the idea that Anna is just an ignorant 11-year-old,

**Comment [4]:** The writer introduces the main characters and the actors who play them.

The writer presents the conflict in the film and gives an overview of the two sides of a social issue that the film brings to the forefront: Assisted suicide. The writer is careful not to reveal the climax or the resolution of the film.

**Comment [5]:** Topic sentence reinforces the claim and provides the evidence the writer will discuss in the paragraph.

**Comment [6]:** Evidence: The writer says that the use of flashbacks aid in presenting the issue of assisted suicide; she gives limited examples of how the sisters, Anna and Kate, struggled in the past—Anna with her forced donations and caring for her sister, Kate with her illness. The technical decision of the flashback is perfect to prove her claim, but she should have given descriptions of specific flashbacks from the film to better illustrate her point.

**Comment [7]:** Warrant: The writer suggests that the parents' decision to genetically engineer Anna is not explained in great detail (through flashback) because it is easier to dislike them this way. She is suggesting that the film positions its audience to side with Anna and Kate.

**Comment [8]:** Evidence: The first sentence is wordy and needs clarification.

The writer discusses more flashbacks and the use of voiceovers (specifically at the beginning of the film) as evidence to prove that these technical decisions use emotion to position the audience to side with the girls—not the parents—from the beginning. She is on the right track with this evidence, but she really needs to be more specific about what the flashbacks are about and what the voiceovers actually say.

**Comment [9]:** Concluding sentence echoes the claim.

**Comment [10]:** Topic sentence: The writer will zoom in on one, specific scene from the film that she thinks best presents the social issue of assisted suicide. It could be revised to flow more smoothly.

which was a previous thought laid by the movie through Anna constantly changing her opinion about going to court. With Sara's obvious devotion to Kate's life through creating a genetically engineered baby for spare parts, her ears had been deaf to all the calls Kate has made about wanting to die, which is backed up with the comment from Mr. Fitzgerald and Jesse saying Sara never listens. This completely shifts the feeling of the audience from thinking of medical emancipation for Anna to the freedom of Kate's assisted suicide to let go. The current issue of assisted suicide is shown through emotional appeal of being ready to let someone go by her own choice, with an inevitable outcome anyway, paired with Sara's realization that her clinginess is holding Kate back.

Being interested in this social issue or the issue of medical emancipation is the driving force to see this movie with everything being centered with social issues. Overall, *My Sister's Keeper* well represents the social issue of assisted suicide but lacks having the views of each side shown.

#### Teacher's Summative Comments:

This assignment calls for students to do research and reading about the social issue on which they choose to focus; since this unit was taught at the end of the semester, that requirement was omitted. The final product would have been stronger with that additional research, and I will not leave it out in the future.

While this paper went through a peer review and feedback loop, it is clear that the writer would benefit from conferring with me and then going through another revision. The writer stays focused on the social issue of assisted suicide, though one may argue that death with dignity better names the issue in the film. While she brings up the correct technical decisions by the

**Comment [11]:** The writer needs to more clearly articulate what is happening in this scene to make it such a powerful part of the film for the audience. The big "a-ha" for the audience is that Anna is, indeed, her sister's keeper, because she is willing to do *anything* for her—even risk losing her mother's love by claiming she does not want to donate a kidney to save Kate's life. Despite this revelation for the audience, the mother, Sara, *still* does not get it; she wants Anna to be forced to donate a kidney because she is not ready for Kate to give up. It proves to be a complicated part of the story for the student writer to analyze. Nonetheless, this writer recognizes that it is a powerful piece of evidence to support her claim.

**Comment [12]:** Warrant: The writer tries to explain that in this court scene, the audience's emotions shift from caring about Anna's medical emancipation and *her* freedom over her own body, to caring about Kate's freedom to *choose* to die by no longer accepting Anna's organs and blood. This proves to be a complicated issue to explain for a student writer.

**Comment [13]:** Conclusion: The writer gives one last evaluation of the film. She echoes her claim, with the acknowledgment that the film does not adequately portray both sides of the assisted suicide debate.

writer and director to help prove her claim, she does not clearly paint a picture of the scenes she uses as evidence. The reader needs these metal images and descriptions, especially if he has not seen the movie. This is a new kind of evidence for student writers to use, as they are used to finding quotes in novels to support a claim. We could have done more activities in class that address the kind of visual evidence provided in a film, which could have led to a stronger paper on the student's part.

<b><i>Argument Rubric</i></b>	<b>Highly Proficient</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Not Yet</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Addresses all aspects of the prompt with a highly focused and convincing response.	Addresses the prompt and stays on task; provides a generally convincing response.	Attempts to address the prompt but lacks focus or is off-task.
<b>Controlling Idea</b>	Establishes a substantive and credible claim or proposal.	Establishes a credible claim or proposal.	Establishes a claim or proposal but is weak or off task.
<b>Development</b>	Develops a detailed and convincing argument or proposal; provides relevant evidence in the form of examples or explanations with statements from reading material.	Develops a satisfactory argument or proposal using reasoning and adequate detail to support claim or proposal; provides relevant evidence from text(s) in the form of examples or explanations relevant to the argument or proposal.	Attempts to develop an argument or proposal but lacks sufficient reasoning and/or detail to support the claim; does not provide relevant and/or sufficient evidence from texts in the form of examples or explanations relevant to the argument or proposal.
<b>Organization</b>	Applies an appropriate text structure that develops reasoning; applies a logic model, such as deductive reasoning.	Applies an appropriate text structure that develops reasoning.	Provides a weak text structure; composition is confusing.

<b>Conventions</b>	Demonstrates a well-developed command of standard English conventions and cohesion; employs language and tone appropriate to audience and purpose.	Demonstrates a satisfactory command of standard English conventions and cohesion; employs language and tone appropriate to audience and purpose.	Demonstrates a weak command of standard English conventions; lacks cohesion; employs language and tone that are not appropriate to audience and purpose.
<b>Reading/Research</b>	Demonstrates accurate and effective use of reading materials to develop argument or proposal and a solid understanding of content as presented in the prompt.	Demonstrates generally effective use of reading materials to develop argument or proposal and an understanding of content as presented in the prompt.	Demonstrates weak use of reading materials to develop argument or proposal.