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**Annotation and Active Reading Worksheet:
Plato’s Allegory of the Cave (5 points)**

In this activity, you will practice reading closely for textual evidence and analyzing this evidence to reach some interpretive insights.

At the beginning of Book 7 of *Republic*, we are asked to imagine a rather strange cave and its prisoners. Then we are told the story of what happens when some of them are liberated and struggle to escape. As Socrates informs us, this story is meant to illustrate “the effect of education... and the lack of it on our nature.” Since it is an **allegory**, every detail has some sort of symbolic or metaphoric significance. Your task here is to collect details and reflect on what they might symbolize.

Instructions:

- a) Before completing this assignment, watch the video and read the handout about the CRIT method.
- b) As you read follow steps 1-3 on the CRIT handout: **annotate the assigned passage** from the *Republic* by underlining or circling key words, paraphrasing actions and ideas, or giving names to the different parts of this story, etc. Be sure to mark anything you think is particularly interesting or puzzling.
- c) For step 4, **write down some notes in response** to the questions below. Your notes don’t have to be super-detailed; concentrate on what interests you!
- d) Finally, follow the instructions on the CRIT handout for steps 5 and 6. Write down a brief argument and reflections on this sheet.

Describe the place where the characters are: what is it like there? List the key words or phrases that you think are most significant and interesting	Explain what the characters do in this place—look for verbs. What do they see and feel? What else do they do (talk, move, interact with others)? List key words that indicate significant perceptions, emotions, and actions.	Evaluate what the characters know and believe: what is their reality? Are they gaining new knowledge, questioning or doubting? List key word or phrases that describe their way of thinking and understanding the world.
1. The beginning: prisoners in a cave		

Describe the place, environment	What are the characters doing, seeing, feeling?	What do they know and believe?
2. The first step: standing up and looking around		
3. Leaving the cave		
4. Adjusting to the world above		
5. Returning to the cave		

Book 7

SOCRATES' NARRATION CONTINUES:

514a SOCRATES: Next, then, compare the effect of education and that of the lack of it on our nature to an experience like this. Imagine human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up that is open to the light and as wide as the cave itself. They have been there since childhood, with their necks and legs fettered, so that they are fixed in the same place, able to see only in front of them, because their fetter prevents them from turning their heads around. Light is provided by a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the prisoners and the fire, there is an elevated road stretching. Imagine that along this road a low wall has been built—like the screen in front of people that is provided by puppeteers, and above which they show their puppets.

GLAUCON: I am imagining it.

c SOCRATES: Also imagine, then, that there are people alongside the wall carrying multifarious artifacts that project above it—statues of people and other animals, made of stone, wood, and every material. And as you would expect, some of the carriers are talking and some are silent.

GLAUCON: It is a strange image you are describing, and strange prisoners.

5 SOCRATES: They are like us. I mean, in the first place, do you think these prisoners have ever seen anything of themselves and one another besides the shadows that the fire casts on the wall of the cave in front of them?

GLAUCON: How could they, if they have to keep their heads motionless throughout life?

SOCRATES: What about the things carried along the wall? Isn't the same true where they are concerned?

GLAUCON: Of course.

SOCRATES: And if they could engage in discussion with one another, don't you think they would assume that the words they used applied to the things they see passing in front of them?

GLAUCON: They would have to.

SOCRATES: What if their prison also had an echo from the wall facing them? When one of the carriers passing along the wall spoke, do you think

they would believe that anything other than the shadow passing in front of them was speaking?

GLAUCON: I do not, by Zeus.

SOCRATES: All in all, then, what the prisoners would take for true reality is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts.

GLAUCON: That's entirely inevitable.

SOCRATES: Consider, then, what being released from their bonds and cured of their foolishness would naturally be like, if something like this should happen to them. When one was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his neck around, walk, and look up toward the light, he would be pained by doing all these things and be unable to see the things whose shadows he had seen before, because of the flashing lights. What do you think he would say if we told him that what he had seen before was silly nonsense, but that now—because he is a bit closer to what is, and is turned toward things that *are* more—he sees more correctly? And in particular, if we pointed to each of the things passing by and compelled him to answer what each of them is, don't you think he would be puzzled and believe that the things he saw earlier were more truly real than the ones he was being shown?

GLAUCON: Much more so.

SOCRATES: And if he were compelled to look at the light itself, wouldn't his eyes be pained and wouldn't he turn around and flee toward the things he is able to see, and believe that they are really clearer than the ones he is being shown?

GLAUCON: He would.

SOCRATES: And if someone dragged him by force away from there, along the rough, steep, upward path, and did not let him go until he had dragged him into the light of the sun, wouldn't he be pained and angry at being treated that way? And when he came into the light, wouldn't he have his eyes filled with sunlight and be unable to see a single one of the things now said to be truly real?

GLAUCON: No, he would not be able to—at least not right away.

SOCRATES: He would need time to get adjusted, I suppose, if he is going to see the things in the world above. At first, he would see shadows most easily, then images of men and other things in water, then the things themselves. From these, it would be easier for him to go on to look at the things in the sky and the sky itself at night, gazing at the light of the stars and the moon, than during the day, gazing at the sun and the light of the sun.

GLAUCON: Of course.

5 SOCRATES: Finally, I suppose, he would be able to see the sun—not reflections of it in water or some alien place, but the sun just by itself in its own place—and be able to look at it and see what it is like.

 GLAUCON: Necessarily.

10 SOCRATES: After that, he would already be able to conclude about it that it provides the seasons and the years, governs everything in the visible world, and is in some way the cause of all the things that he and his fellows used to see.

 GLAUCON: That would clearly be his next step.

 SOCRATES: What about when he reminds himself of his first dwelling place, what passed for wisdom there, and his fellow prisoners? Don't you think he would count himself happy for the change and pity the others?

 GLAUCON: Certainly.

 SOCRATES: And if there had been honors, praises, or prizes among them for the one who was sharpest at identifying the shadows as they passed by; and was best able to remember which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously; and who was thus best able to prophesize the future, do you think that our man would desire these rewards or envy those among the prisoners who were honored and held power? Or do you think he would feel with Homer that he would much prefer to "work the earth as a serf for another man, a man without possessions of his own,"¹ and go through any sufferings, rather than share their beliefs and live as they do?

 GLAUCON: Yes, I think he would rather suffer anything than live like that.

 SOCRATES: Consider this too, then. If this man went back down into the cave and sat down in his same seat, wouldn't his eyes be filled with darkness, coming suddenly out of the sun like that?

 GLAUCON: Certainly.

517a SOCRATES: Now, if he had to compete once again with the perpetual prisoners in recognizing the shadows, while his sight was still dim and before his eyes had recovered, and if the time required for readjustment was not short, wouldn't he provoke ridicule? Wouldn't it be said of him that he had returned from his upward journey with his eyes ruined, and that it is not worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And as for anyone who tried to free the prisoners and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?

 GLAUCON: They certainly would.

¹ *Odyssey* 11.489–90. The shade of Achilles speaks these words to Odysseus, who is visiting Hades. Plato is likening the cave dwellers to the dead.

 SOCRATES: This image, my dear Glaucon, must be fitted together as a whole with what we said before. The realm revealed through sight should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the sun's power. And if you think of the upward journey and the seeing of things above as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you won't mistake my intention—since it is what you wanted to hear about. Only the god knows whether it is true. But this is how these phenomena seem to me: in the knowable realm, the last thing to be seen is the form of the good, and it is seen only with toil and trouble. Once one has seen it, however, one must infer that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that in the visible realm it produces both light and its source, and that in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding; and that anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see it.

 GLAUCON: I agree, so far as I am able.

 SOCRATES: Come on, then, and join me in this further thought: you should not be surprised that the ones who get to this point are not willing to occupy themselves with human affairs, but that, on the contrary, their souls are always eager to spend their time above. I mean, that is surely what we would expect, if indeed the image I described before is also accurate here.

 GLAUCON: It is what we would expect.

 SOCRATES: What about when someone, coming from looking at divine things, looks to the evils of human life? Do you think it is surprising that he behaves awkwardly and appears completely ridiculous, if—while his sight is still dim and he has not yet become accustomed to the darkness around him—he is compelled, either in the courts or elsewhere, to compete about the shadows of justice, or about the statues of which they are the shadows; and to dispute the way these things are understood by people who have never seen justice itself?

 GLAUCON: It is not surprising at all.

 SOCRATES: On the contrary, anyone with any sense, at any rate, would remember that eyes may be confused in two ways and from two causes: 518a when they change from the light into the darkness, or from the darkness into the light. If he kept in mind that the same applies to the soul, then when he saw a soul disturbed and unable to see something, he would not laugh absurdly. Instead, he would see whether it had come from a brighter life and was dimmed through not having yet become accustomed to the dark, or from greater ignorance into greater light and was dazzled by the increased brilliance. Then he would consider the first soul happy in its experience and life, and pity the latter. But even if he wanted to ridicule it, at least his ridiculing it would make him less ridiculous than ridiculing a soul that had come from the light above.

5 GLAUCON: That's an entirely reasonable claim.

c SOCRATES: Then here is how we must think about these matters, if that is true: education is not what some people boastfully profess it to be. They say that they can pretty much put knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes.

c GLAUCON: Yes, they do say that.

5 SOCRATES: But here is what our present account shows about this power to learn that is present in everyone's soul, and the instrument with which each of us learns: just as an eye cannot be turned around from darkness to light except by turning the whole body, so this instrument must be turned around from what-comes-to-be together with the whole soul, until it is able to bear to look at what is and at the brightest thing that is—the one we call the good. Isn't that right?

d GLAUCON: Yes.

5 SOCRATES: Of this, then—of this very turning around—there would be a craft concerned with how this instrument can be most easily and effectively turned around, not of putting sight into it. On the contrary, it takes for granted that sight is there, though not turned in the right way or looking where it should look, and contrives to redirect it appropriately.

GLAUCON: That's probably right.

10 SOCRATES: The other so-called virtues of the soul, then, do seem to be closely akin to those of the body: they really are not present in it initially, but are added later by habit and practice. The virtue of wisdom, on the other hand, belongs above all, so it seems, to something more godlike, which never loses its power, but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is led around. Or haven't you ever noticed in people who are said to be bad, but clever, how sharp the vision of their little soul is and how sharply it distinguishes the things it is turned toward? This shows that its sight is not inferior, but is compelled to serve vice, so that the sharper it sees, the more evils it accomplishes.

5 GLAUCON: I certainly have.

b SOCRATES: However, if this element of this sort of nature had been hampered at right from childhood, and struck free of the leaden weights, as it were, of kinship with becoming, which have been fastened to it by eating and other such pleasures and indulgences, which turn its soul's vision downward²—if, I say, it got rid of these and turned toward truly real things, then the same element of the same people would see them most sharply, just as it now does the things it is now turned toward.

² See 611b9–612a6.

GLAUCON: That's probably right.

c SOCRATES: Isn't it also probable, then—indeed, doesn't it follow necessarily from what was said before—that uneducated people who have no experience of true reality will never adequately govern a city, and neither will people who have been allowed to spend their whole lives in education. The former fail because they do not have a single goal in life at which all their actions, public and private, inevitably aim; the latter because they would refuse to act, thinking they had emigrated, while still alive, to the Isles of the Blessed.

5 GLAUCON: True.

10 SOCRATES: It is our task as founders, then, to compel the best natures to learn what was said before³ to be the most important thing: namely, to see the good; to ascend that ascent. And when they have ascended and looked sufficiently, we must not allow them to do what they are allowed to do now.

GLAUCON: What's that, then?

5 SOCRATES: To stay there and refuse to go down again to the prisoners in the cave and share their labors and honors, whether the inferior ones or the more excellent ones.

GLAUCON: You mean we are to treat them unjustly, making them live a worse life when they could live a better one?

e SOCRATES: You have forgotten again, my friend, that the law is not concerned with making any one class in the city do outstandingly well, but is contriving to produce this condition in the city as a whole, harmonizing the citizens together through both persuasion and compulsion, and making them share with each other the benefit they can confer on the community.⁴ It produces such men in the city, not in order to allow them to turn in whatever direction each one wants, but to make use of them to bind the city together.

5 GLAUCON: That's true. Yes, I had forgotten.

b SOCRATES: Observe, then, Glaucon, that we won't be unjustly treating those who have become philosophers in our city, but that what we will say to them, when we compel them to take care of the others and guard them, will be just. We will say: "When people like you come to be in other cities, they are justified in not sharing in the others' labors. After all, they have grown there spontaneously, against the will of the constitution in each of them. And when something grows of its own accord and owes no debt for

³ 505a–b.

⁴ 420b–421c, 462a–466c.



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