

Good example of  
essay on critical  
analysis of we do  
abortions here: a  
nurses tale...

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In “ We Do Abortions Here: A Nurse’s Tale,” Sallie Tisdale recounts her experiences and perspective as a nurse in an abortion clinic. Through her experiences, Sallie wishes to inform her audience that, despite the very valid moral and ethical objections she may have to the practice of abortion, and the unsavory nature of her job, she feels it is a necessary and valid one. With very few exceptions, she is successful – Tisdale’s writing is highly emotional and harrowing, describing each detail of the abortion process with a devastating realness that is emotional and harrowing. Through a combination of credibility and emotional appeals, Tisdale manages to cut to the core of the ethical and sentimental complexities of abortion.

Tisdale’s claim throughout the essay is that, though abortion is a horrible thing that should never be done in a perfect world, the unjust and complicated nature of the world does make it absolutely necessary as an executable right. The world of abortions is shown to be cruel and unfeeling, as well as emotionally draining for everyone involved (“‘How can you stand it?’ Even the client asks”) (Tisdale). Nonetheless, Tisdale’s own experiences have led her to believe that abortion is a viable answer to the dodgy answer to the cultural acceptance of birth control as a 100% effective method of contraception. The failures of the rest of society (birth control, rape, STDs) make abortion necessary as a corrective, and her job is shown to be one of the hardest, and yet most fulfilling. In essence, Tisdale argues for the continued justification of her existence as an abortion clinic nurse.

There are certain assumptions that are frequently made about Tisdale’s profession, the issue of abortion at hand and pro-life advocates throughout “ We Do Abortions Here.” Right from the start, Tisdale is operating from a

defensive position, as she presumes from the start that people do not envy her for having that job, or even actively resent her for the work she does. Her answer to that is to elaborate on her perspective on abortion, which is that it is an issue she understands in a micro-level, but which she will never be able to grasp as a larger abstraction: “ In abortion the absolute must always be tempered by the contextual, because both are real, both valid, both hard” (Tisdale). The assumptions about pro-life advocates are that they are hostile and actively dangerous; Tisdale describes an experience in which she must sign for a package and is frightened, highlighting the constant fear of being bombed. These assumptions are never explicitly stated, but are appropriately framed in Tisdale’s own perspective.

Anecdotal evidence is the primary resource for evidence in “ We Do Abortions Here,” as Tisdale largely relies on her personal experience of being an abortion nurse to speak about the issue. She never claims to speak for the whole issue of abortion, simply her experience; that being said, she wishes her experience to be representative of a larger whole. The mundanity of the day-to-day nature of the job is shown through her perspective, putting the monolithic topic of abortion in a more accessible light: “ There is a numbing sameness lurking in this job: the same questions, the same answers, even the same trembling tone in the voices. The worst is the sameness of human failure, of inadequacy in the face of each day's dull demands” (Tisdale). Essentially, her claims are supported by her experiences with her clients, all of whom are afraid, uneducated, or ignorant in various ways, but all needing to have their wishes respected with few exceptions (and those are determined by the doctor).

In attempting to convince her audience of the necessity of abortion, Tisdale relies chiefly on emotional appeals and her own experience as an abortion clinic nurse, while supplementing it with appeals to reason. Highly detailed and emotionally charged language is contrasted with a disturbing distance that she has to put on when she is at work, which has an effect on her just as much as anyone. Her descriptions of the abortion process themselves are detailed and harrowing, describing the “ low clatter and snap of forceps, the clock of the tanaculum, and a pulling, sucking sound” involved in the procedure (Tisdale). This shows that the people who perform abortions are not immune to the distasteful and tragic nature of the procedure, and shocks the reader into feeling the same way. However, Tisdale also leavens this with descriptions of the women who come in to get abortions, showing how confused and frustrated they are themselves with the prospect of pregnancy. People who deserve and don’t deserve abortions (in her eyes) are described in equal measure, making the issue even more complex:

“ I see women who berate themselves with violent emotions for their first and only abortion, and others who return three times, five times, hauling two or three children, who cannot remember to take a pill or where they put the diaphragm” (Tisdale).

While Tisdale’s arguments are largely convincing and entirely affecting, there are some logical fallacies that do crop up throughout the essay. First, there is the implicit assumption that her experiences are representative of everyone’s; by focusing on her own personal experiences, the essay loses a slight bit of potency as a treatise on the practice as a whole. Nonetheless, she leavens this by never pretending it is anything other than her

experience. She even calls herself out for the assumptions she makes about others: “ I call them girls with maternal benignity. I cannot imagine them as mothers” (Tisdale). By writing so informally and so personally, she manages to avoid a lack of objectivity

Despite these fallacies, however, Tisdale manages to succeed more than she fails in her arguments to keep abortion as a cruel (but necessary and legal) practice. Her arguments essentially boil down to the unfortunate need to leave abortion open as a choice: “ I imagine a world where this won't be necessary, and then return to the world where it is” (Tisdale). Tisdale’s highly emotional writing is certainly shocking and provocative, but it is also effective at expanding on the anxieties and concerns of someone in a very harrowing profession that can be emotionally draining and even puts her in harm’s way from anti-abortion activists. The dispassionate nature of Tisdale’s writing, as well as the acknowledgement of her ambivalence, is the key to making this essay such a compelling piece on a complex issue.

## **Works Cited**

Tisdale, Sallie. “ We Do Abortions Here: A Nurse’s Story.” In *The Norton Reader* (13th ed.).

1987. New York: W. W Norton & Company, Inc., 2012. Print.