4.3 Identifying the overarching thesis

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 17 marks**

KEY WORDS overarching thesis • supporting claim • infer • implied • rational • vindication

Objective

Build the skills to find the **overarching thesis** of a longer text, and to tell it apart from the claims that support it.

You must be able to:

- tell the overarching thesis from supporting claims
- find a thesis that must be inferred
- explain how supporting claims serve the thesis

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ Thesis and supporting claims

level	example: Wollstonecraft, 1792
overarching thesis	women should be educated as rational beings, equal to men
supporting claim	women seem weak because they are taught only to please
supporting claim	education would make women better citizens, wives and mothers
evidence	examples of girls' training in manners and dress

■ Finding the thesis

1. Ask: what single idea do *all* the parts support?
2. Look at the start and the end.
3. Check: can it be argued with? A fact is not a thesis.
4. If it is never stated, **infer** it and state it in your own words.

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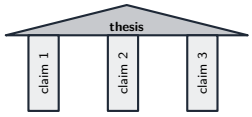
■ **Worked example**

Task: a writer describes three poorly lit streets, gives accident figures for each, then praises one town's new lights. State the thesis.

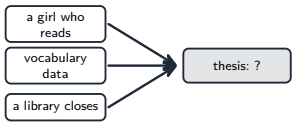
Answer: The thesis is implied: "Our town should install better street lighting." The streets are evidence of the problem, and the other town is evidence that the solution works.

2 Practice

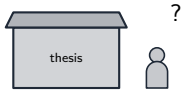
2.1 Explain the difference between an overarching thesis and a supporting claim. [2]



2.2 A text describes a girl who reads every night, gives data about readers' vocabulary, and ends with a story of a library closing. Infer its thesis and explain your reasoning. [3]



2.3 Explain why a writer might leave a thesis unstated. [3]



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3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Read the passage.

> "Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience... I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves."

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792

(a) Identify what Wollstonecraft says will end "blind obedience". [1]

1 Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience... I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves.

Wollstonecraft, 1792

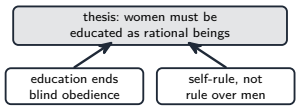
(b) Explain the difference she draws between power "over men" and "over themselves". [1]

(c) Explain why this distinction helps her overarching thesis. [1]

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3.2 Use the Wollstonecraft passage in Question 3.1. Many readers in 1792 believed that women should be trained mainly to please men.

Write a thesis that states Wollstonecraft's overarching argument, and one paragraph that explains how her choices in the passage support it. [6]



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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

the overarching thesis is the main claim of the whole text; supporting claims are smaller claims, often one per paragraph, that give reasons for the thesis

2.2

an inferred thesis, for example “libraries must be kept open because reading builds young people’s language”; the first two parts show the benefits of reading; the closing story shows the threat, so the parts together argue for protecting libraries

2.3

a stated thesis might make a hostile reader stop reading; letting the evidence speak lets readers reach the conclusion themselves; this can be more persuasive, and in satire or story it keeps the effect subtle, though it risks being misunderstood

3.1

(a) strengthening women’s minds by enlarging them (education)

(b) she does not want women to rule men, only to control their own minds and lives

(c) it answers the fear that educated women would threaten men, so readers can accept equal education more easily

3.2

thesis: a thesis that accurately states her overarching argument, for example that women must be educated as rational beings

evidence: quotes or describes “Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it”; quotes or describes “not... power over men; but over themselves”

commentary: explains how the cause-and-effect sentence links education to independence; explains how the distinction reassures a doubtful male audience

sophistication: explains the situation with insight, for example the risk of mockery, or how she frames equality as a benefit to all

model: “Wollstonecraft argues that women must be educated as rational beings, and she makes the claim safe for a doubtful age. Her first sentence is a promise of cause and effect: ‘Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience.’ Education is the cause; independence the effect. She then answers the fear her readers would feel: ‘I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves.’ By separating self-rule from rule over others, she presents women’s education not as a threat to men but as the basis for better citizens.”

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