

6.10 Developing a literary thesis statement

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 12 marks

Objective

Build the skills to write a thesis about a **long text** 长篇论点.

You must be able to:

- state what a thesis expresses and requires
- explain the particular difficulty of a long text
- state what the CED does not require
- narrow a thesis to something an essay can prove

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ The requirement

An interpretation of a literary text, requiring defense through textual evidence and a line of reasoning, explained through commentary.

■ The difficulty

A long text invites a thesis too large to defend: "the novel explores the nature of freedom" cannot be proved in five paragraphs. The skill is narrowing.

■ What is not required

A thesis need not list points, elements or evidence. Narrowing is not the same as listing.

■ How to narrow

Attach the claim to something specific the text does—a pattern, a change, a contrast—rather than to a theme. "The novel's three refusals of inheritance make freedom look like poverty" is defensible; "the novel explores freedom" is not.

2 Practice

2.1 Explain the particular difficulty of a thesis about a long text.

[2]

2.2 State how to narrow a thesis. [2]

2.3 Narrowing is not listing.

(a) State the difference. [2]

(b) State what a thesis requires as defense. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 A thesis about "the nature of freedom" in a novel is likely [1]

- **A** too large to defend
 - **B** ideal
 - **C** too narrow
 - **D** a line of reasoning
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3.2 A defensible thesis attaches its claim to [1]

- **A** something specific the text does
 - **B** a general theme
 - **C** the author's life
 - **D** the genre
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3.3 A student writes: "This novel is about the conflict between duty and desire."

(a) State the problem. [1]

(b) Rewrite it as a defensible thesis. [2]

4 Go further

- work through the **6.10 Developing a literary thesis statement** lesson on the **Learn** page;
- read the **Longer Fiction or Drama II** section of the AP English Literature handout on the **Know** page.

Solutions

2.1 a long text invites a claim too large to defend in an essay, so the skill is narrowing.

2.2 attach the claim to something specific the text does —a pattern, a change or a contrast rather than a theme.

2.3 (a) narrowing makes the claim provable; listing merely announces topics without making a claim. (b) textual evidence and a line of reasoning explained through commentary.

3.1 A. too large.

3.2 A. something specific the text does.

3.3 (a) it names a theme rather than making an arguable claim. (b) any narrowed arguable claim, e.g. "the novel gives duty all its formal language and desire none, so the reader hears duty as public and desire as unspeakable".