

6.10 Developing a literary thesis statement

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 18 marks**

KEY WORDS long text 长篇论点

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

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

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]

3.4 Full free-response task. Choose a novel or play of literary merit in which a minor character appears in only two or three scenes but changes how the reader understands the protagonist. Write an essay that argues an interpretation of the work as a whole through that character's function.

Your thesis must make a claim about the **whole** text, not only about the scenes in which the character appears.

Marked on the AP 6-point rubric: **Row A — Thesis (1), Row B — Evidence and Commentary (4), Row C — Sophistication (1).**

[6]

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”.

3.4 Row A — Thesis (1). The point requires a claim about the **work entire**, argued through the minor character. **Earns it:** “The novel needs a character who wants nothing from the protagonist, because every other relationship in the book is a transaction; her three scenes are where the reader is finally allowed to see him unpriced.” **Does not:** “This character is important to the novel and helps develop the protagonist” — true of any character, so not defensible.

Row B — Evidence and Commentary (0–4). The difficulty of a long text is **selection**, and the marking rewards it. Four points requires evidence drawn from across the work, not only from the character’s own scenes: what changes in the protagonist’s behaviour after each appearance, and what the novel withholds in her absence. Commentary must connect each piece to the thesis rather than to the character. The common cap at 3 is an essay that reads the three scenes brilliantly and never leaves them, so the thesis’s claim about the whole text stays unproved. Plot summary of the intervening chapters caps at 2.

Row C — Sophistication (1). Earned by a reading that survives its own strongest objection — that a character with so little page time cannot carry the interpretation — and answers it from the text, for example by showing that the novel’s other relationships are all narrated at length precisely because they must be explained, while hers needs no explaining. Sustained complexity, not one perceptive line.