

9.6 Developing a literary thesis statement

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

KEY WORDS literary argument thesis 文学论证论点

Objective

Build the skills to write a **literary argument thesis** 文学论证论点.

You must be able to:

- state what a thesis expresses and requires
- explain the difficulty of a chosen-text essay
- state what the CED does not require
- make a thesis answer the prompt rather than the novel

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 chosen-text difficulty

When you choose the text, you arrive knowing it well — and the risk is writing what you know about the novel instead of what the prompt asked.

■ What is not required

No list of points, elements or evidence.

■ Answering the prompt

The thesis must contain the prompt's own terms, redescribed as a claim about this text. If the thesis could stand unchanged under a different prompt, it is answering the novel and not the question.

2 Practice

2.1 State what a thesis expresses and requires. [2]

2.2 Explain the difficulty of a chosen-text essay. [2]

2.3 The thesis must answer the prompt.

(a) State the test. [2]

(b) State what the thesis must contain. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 A thesis that could stand unchanged under a different prompt is answering [1]

- **A** the novel, not the question
- **B** the question
- **C** both
- **D** neither

3.2 In a chosen-text essay the risk is writing [1]

- **A** what you know about the novel
- **B** too little
- **C** about the wrong book
- **D** without evidence

- (a) State the problem. [1]
- (b) Explain the fix. [2]

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

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Solutions

2.1 an interpretation of a literary text requiring defense through textual evidence and a line of reasoning explained by commentary.

2.2 the writer knows the chosen text well, so the risk is writing what they know rather than what the prompt asked.

2.3 (a) ask whether the thesis could stand unchanged under a different prompt. (b) the prompt's own terms, redescribed as a claim about this text.

3.1 A. the novel.

3.2 A. what you know about the novel.

3.3 (a) it may be a good claim about the wrong question. (b) rewrite it so the prompt's terms appear as part of the claim, keeping the interpretation but pointing it at what was asked.

3.4 Row A — Thesis (1). A **literary argument** thesis: interpretive, defensible, and about the work's meaning rather than its plot. **Earns it:** "The play makes the promise binding precisely because it was foolish — keeping it is the only thing that remains of the person who made it, and the work asks whether that is loyalty or vanity." **Does not:** "In this novel, the character keeps a promise and it goes badly, which shows that promises can be harmful."

Row B — Evidence and Commentary (0–4). Evidence must be **specific to the work** — a named scene, a decision, a line — not a plot summary, and commentary must connect each piece to the interpretation. Four points requires a line of reasoning that develops: what the promise cost when made, what it costs when kept, and what the work does with the gap between them. A frequent cap at 3 is an essay whose evidence is accurate and abundant but whose commentary restates the thesis after each example instead of advancing it.

Row C — Sophistication (1). Earned by placing the interpretation in a **broader context** the work supports — a moral tradition, a social expectation, a competing value — or by holding a genuine tension rather than resolving it early. A concluding paragraph that suddenly generalises about "human nature" does not earn the point.