

The Five Paragraph Thematic Essay: this assignment was assembled from Mr. T's (whoever that is) webpage for Central High School (wherever that is). See: <http://chs.mesa.k12.co.us/departments/Language%20Arts/thomas/index.html> Also, I found Peter Pappas' site at <http://www.edteck.com/dbq/testing/thematic.htm> an invaluable resource, as well.

The Essay's Purpose

Thematic essays require students to write a coherent essay that has an introduction, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion. Thematic essays:

- Focus on concepts, plot developments, character behaviors, etc. that help illustrate the film, short story, or novel's theme (or central idea)
- Are not the same as expository essays, i.e. you don't retell the story but use critical thinking to make connections between the novel's theme and its characters/events
- Are supported by evidence or direct references to quotes and actions from the story

Format

Students will write a standard five paragraph essay; however, students can write additional paragraphs (or leave behind the five paragraph structure) if they feel doing so will assist them in better meeting the objectives of the assignment. A title page is mandatory/required.

Objectives

Students will meet the following objectives:

- Demonstrate an understanding of what a theme is
- Demonstrate the ability to make use of relevant evidence to support the essay's central argument

Standards

Students will meet the following objectives:

- Students will use Chicago citation style if they use *in any way* a source other than the film for information, insights, etc.
- Students will use Chicago citation style to create an appropriate title page
- The essay will be completely free of grammatical errors or errors in logic and is a formal essay
- The essay will be type written in font Verdana, Times New Roman, Arial or Calibri (size 11)
- The essay will be evaluated on the basis of an appropriate rubric (see attached)
- The essay will be a minimum 400 words long but no longer than 800 and double-spaced

Structure

Introductory Paragraph: write an appropriate introduction identifying the theme of the film *Stand by Me*. Do not assume the reader has watched the film; therefore, you'll have to introduce and *briefly* describe the story's major events and characters. Close this paragraph with your proposed theme.

Paragraphs 2, 3, 4: each of these paragraphs should be dedicated to a discussion of one action or event that is significant towards your chosen theme. Ensure that all of your sentences segue effectively from one to the next. Again, do not assume the essay's reader has watched the movie; therefore, be prepared to explain things fully and point out why this or that is significant.

Concluding Paragraph: bring your essay to a close by doing the three following things:

1. Restate your theme.
2. Briefly retell the events of the story (that you communicated through the body paragraphs).
3. Close the essay by providing a closing insight into the overall significance of the theme.

Sample Five Paragraph Thematic Essay on *Of Mice and Men*

Before the Lincoln Memorial Martin Luther King Jr. announced, “I have a dream,” and through his hard work and tireless efforts, through his sharing of his dream with millions of Americans, through his hope and determination, the Civil Rights Act was signed by Lyndon Johnson and equality among all people was a step closer to being realized. King exemplified a major theme by one of America’s greatest writers, John Steinbeck. One of the major themes of John Steinbeck’s novel *Of Mice and Men* is that having a dream breeds hope, friendship, and determination, enabling one to strive onward in life with a sense of importance. Three major examples show this idea. The first example is Candy’s loss of his dog and his joining George and Lennie’s dream of owning land. A second example is Crook’s memory of his father’s chicken ranch. A third significant example is George and Lennie’s dream of having their own place. These three examples display the theme that having high aspirations breed hope, friendship, and determination, enabling one to strive onward with a sense of self-worth or importance.

Candy’s loss of his dog and his joining George and Lennie’s dream of owning land displays how a shared dream can breed hope and friendship. After the death of Candy’s dog, Candy experiences a deep sense of loss. He is empty. When Candy overhears George and Lennie talking about owning a piece of land, Candy’s emptiness begins to fill with the dream George and Lennie share. Candy tells George, “Tell you what-. . .Spose I went in with you guys. Tha’s three hundred an’ fifty bucks I put in” (p.33). George’s reserved reaction prompts Candy to bare his soul to George when he tells George that he would ‘make a will an’ leave [his] share to [Lennie and George]” (p.34). George and Lennie allow Candy to share their dream, and this quickly breeds hope, as we find out a little later when Candy is constantly “figurin’ and figurin’” because of his excitement about the “ranch.” But even more importantly, Candy develops a friendship with George and Lennie which is evidenced later in the story when Candy confides in George, “I ought to of shot that dog myself. . .I shouldn’t ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog” (p.39). Candy confides in George about his inner feelings regarding his dog, showing the beginnings of a friendship. Candy’s actions convey the concept that dreams breed hope and friendship.

A second example which shows that having a dream breeds hope and friendship is Crook's memory of his father's chicken ranch. Whereas Candy, Lennie, and George all look to their future for their dream, Crooks looks into his past, remembering the sense of joy he had as a small boy on his father's chicken ranch. Crooks explains to Lennie that the "white kids [came] to play at our place, an' sometimes I went to play with them, and some of them were pretty nice" (p.46). In this passage Crooks alludes to his dream. He dreams of being able to communicate and be with others on an equal basis. He explains to Lennie that his "'ol man didn't like" the white kids playing with Crooks. He tells Lennie, "I never knew till long later why he didn't like that. But I know" (p.47), implying that Crook's father was discriminated against because of his skin color. Crooks' longing for equality in the form of companionship is reiterated later in the same chapter when Crooks bitterly tells Lennie, "Spose you couldn't go into the bunkhouse and play rummy 'cause you was black. . .A guy needs somebody – to be near him. . .a guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who the guy is, long's he's with you. . .a guy gets too lonely and he gets sick" (p.51). Crooks is sick. His illness stems from complete isolation, total discrimination. His illness is a bitterness caused by those discriminating against him.

Ironically, Crooks' bitterness is cured by Candy's and Lennie's inclusion of Crooks in their dream to buy some land. Crooks exposes himself to be hurt with discrimination when he offers to work like a "dog" if Candy and Lennie let him in on the dream. Crooks takes the chance of being deeply hurt again because he hopes he will realize his dream of being equal. When Lennie and Candy enter Crooks' room, Crooks is reluctant to speak with them, and he is defensive. However, as the scene progresses, Crooks comes to a point where he bonds with his newfound companions. Crooks even tells George, "Lennie's a nice fella" (p. 53), showing his excitement and hope of realizing his dream and having a "friend."

Although George crushes Crooks' new-found hope and friendships, Crooks does display his momentary attainment of his dream when he tells Curley's wife, "You got no right messin' around in here at all. . .Now you just get out an' get out quick" (p. 51). Crooks speaks to Curley's wife with

authority, forgetting the fact that he is black and discriminated against, as Curley's wife reminds him when she threatens Crooks with his life and calls him a "nigger." For a brief period of time, Crooks shows that he feels important because he is accepted as an equal by Candy and Lennie. Thus, Crooks displays the idea that having a dream breeds hope and friendship, enabling one to strive onward in life with a sense of importance and self-worth.

A third significant example that having a dream breeds hope, friendship, and determination is George's and Lennie's dream of having their own place. For George the idea of owning his own place would allow him to keep Lennie from getting into trouble. But more importantly, this dream makes George strive toward a goal. George's dream is not even close to becoming a reality until Candy offers to contribute three hundred and fifty dollars to the cause. At that point George, with "eyes full of wonder," says, "I bet we could swing her" (p.42), and suddenly the dream has become a little more solidified, a definite possibility. George, Lennie, and Candy realize that this dream may come true "[r]ight squack in one month" (p.44). George resolves to save every cent possible to pay off the little ranch. With the knowledge that their dream can be realized, Lennie, Candy, and especially George not only bond as good friends and develop an optimism about their future, but they develop a determination which will enable them to improve their situation in their present lives. This determination is evidenced when George says, "We'll do her. . . We'll fix up that little old place an' we'll go live there" (p.45). George's and Lennie's dream of having their own place breeds hope, friendship, and especially a strong determination to make that dream a reality. This ultimately enables George, Lennie, and Candy to strive onward in life with a sense of self-worth and importance.

The idea that having a dream breeds hope, friendship, and determination, enabling one to strive onward in life with a sense of self-worth and importance is a major theme in Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*. Three examples show this idea, which runs throughout the novel. The first example is Candy's loss of his dog and joining George and Lennie's dream of owning land. Another example is Crooks' memory of his father's chicken ranch. A third example is George and Lennie's

dream of having their own place. Steinbeck obviously meant to impress upon his readers the idea that dreaming is an important part of every person's life. When one dreams, he hopes, develops friendships, and shows determination, and as a result, he feels a strong sense of value. He learns to value himself more. Just as Martin Luther King Jr. realized, so too Steinbeck understood that to dream is a fundamental need of all people. Without dreaming nothing great is ever accomplished. But even more importantly, sharing a dream with others reaps not only rewards for an individual, but also rewards for all those involved and ultimately all of humanity.

Writing Rubric Theme			
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<p>Precision</p> <p>Precision is achieved through a combination of minimizing word count and making effective use of repetition in order to reinforce an important idea. Also, precision is achieved by ensuring sentences segue from one to the next, paragraphs transition well from one to the next, and the thesis/conclusion agrees.</p> <p>Word fillers are extraneous (un-necessary) words that do nothing but take up space sentence. In short, word fillers add to word count while doing nothing to develop your ideas. Basically, you can remove word fillers and your composition will not suffer. In fact removing word fillers enhances the precision of your composition because it reduces word count.</p>	<p>Composition is <i>entirely free</i> of extraneous words and word fillers like the words <i>that, which, etc.</i></p> <p>Maximum word count is not exceeded.</p> <p>Essay is written in 100 or fewer words than the maximum <i>and</i> the written piece does not suffer for it.</p>	<p>Composition has at least <i>two or three</i> examples of an extraneous word being used like <i>that, which, etc.</i> being used.</p> <p>Maximum word count is not exceeded.</p> <p>Essay is written in 50 or fewer words than the maximum <i>and</i> the written piece does not suffer for it.</p>	<p>Composition has at least <i>four or more</i> examples of an extraneous word being used, e.g. <i>that, which, etc.</i> being used.</p> <p>Maximum word count is exceeded.</p>
<p>Diction & Logic</p> <p>Diction is the writer’s choice of words used during the writing process. Effective diction is achieved by avoiding the use of clichés and the use of informal language like personal pronouns, e.g. I, we, us, ours, etc. and ensuring words are used properly (words are used in ways matching their definitions).</p> <p>Effective logic contributes to the clarity and structure of a composition. Lapses, or errors, in logic contribute to confusion in the reader and weaken the composition. Logical errors are committed when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -you are inconsistent, i.e. saying one thing while meaning another -you make an assertion that is unsupported -you include logical fallacies in your composition 	<p>Writer makes consistent use of effective word choice as defined in the description for “Diction and Logic.”</p> <p>Composition is not affected by any obvious lapses or errors in logic as defined in the description.</p>	<p>Writer makes <i>two or three</i> errors with respect to word usage as defined in the description for “Diction and Logic.”</p> <p>Composition is affected by <i>three or four</i> problems related to logic as defined in the description.</p>	<p>Writer makes <i>four or five</i> errors with respect to word usage as defined in the description for “Diction and Logic.”</p> <p>Composition is affected by <i>five or more</i> problems related to logic as defined in the description.</p>
<p>Grammar, Punctuation & Mechanics</p> <p>Grammar refers to the way words are assembled to make units of meaning, e.g. prepositional phrases, independent clauses, pronoun ambiguity, conjunctive phrases, etc.</p> <p>Punctuation refers to the appropriate usage of symbols to help readers process information, e.g. commas, periods, colons, etc.</p> <p>Mechanics refers to all the technical aspects related to writing like spelling, capitalization, run on sentences, writing in the wrong tense, etc.</p>	<p>No grammar, punctuation and/or mechanical errors detected.</p> <p>Additional things to avoid doing while writing: starting sentences with <i>it</i> without previously establishing proper or strong enough entailment; subject-verb disagreement, e.g. They is happy; comma splices, e.g. I am happy, to be here; mis-use of semi-colons, e.g. He is big; tall; and smart; pronoun ambiguity, e.g. John and Peter ate some pie but he didn’t like it, etc. etc. This list is not exhaustive.</p>	<p><i>Two or three</i> issues or more issues <i>one</i> issue detected with respect to either grammar, punctuation or mechanics as defined in the criterion description for “Grammar, Punctuation & Mechanics” and the “Things to avoid doing” primer.</p>	<p><i>Four or more</i> issues detected with respect to either grammar, punctuation and/or mechanics as defined in the criterion description for “Grammar, Punctuation & Mechanics” and the “Things to avoid doing” primer.</p>

Style & Active Voice

Writing style reflects the writer’s attitude they take towards their topic as reflected in the decisions they make. For example, some writers are quite technical, i.e. they focus heavily upon logic and analysis while others might make more use of humor and personal experience. Style is largely shaped through a combination of a writer’s choice of syntax (the phrases they use), diction (word choice) and tone (attitude expressed through words and details).

You *do not* want to write in passive voice; passive voice is achieved when either the object of an action is made the subject of a sentence, e.g. Why was the road crossed by the chicken?

Passive voice is also achieved by making use of elaborate verb phrases, e.g. must have been, could have been, etc. To avoid passive voice use single word verbs whenever possible, e.g. *was* or *is* or verbs ending in either *-s* or *-ing*.

Also, strive to write with confidence. For example, do not use words like maybe, possibly, or perhaps. Speak with the conviction of an expert.

The essay’s tone contributes *exceptionally* to the reader’s appreciation for the topic as defined in the description for “Style & Active Voice.”

Writer uses a variety of sentence types, e.g. simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex, etc. without compromising clarity or readability.

Composition written *entirely* in active voice.

Writer makes use of figurative language, e.g. metaphors, simile, etc.

The tone contributes *concretely* to the reader’s appreciation for the topic as defined in the criterion description for “Style & Active Voice.”

Writer uses a variety of sentence types, e.g. e.g. simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex, etc. but sometimes clarity and readability are compromised due to *two or three* errors, e.g. using run-on sentences, omitting an important detail, failing to include an effective segue, etc.

Composition written *entirely* in active voice with the *exception of two or three times*.

Writer makes use of figurative language, e.g. metaphors, simile, etc.

The tone contributes *somewhat* to the reader’s appreciation for the topic as defined in the criterion description for “Style & Active Voice.”

Writer uses a variety of sentence types, e.g. simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex, etc. but sometimes clarity and readability are compromised due to *four or more* errors, e.g. using run-on sentences, omitting an important detail, failing to include an effective segue, etc.

Composition written *entirely* in active voice with the *exception of four or more times*.

Essay Structure & Elements

Effectively composed essays are well-organized essays; and well-organized essays have:

- a title page created by following the appropriate template
- a thesis and conclusion that *agree*
- paragraphs that segue/transition effectively from one to the next
- body paragraphs which incorporate relevant information
- sentences that entail effectively with one another

Effective transitions are created by linking individual sentences and paragraphs together through entailment. Entailment exists when one idea follows logically from or is implied by another idea. You create entailment by effectively using logic, making connections, and making use of certain types of punctuation like interjections (—), colons (:) and semi-colons (;).

Title page included and follows template *exactly*.

Thesis and conclusion completely agree and entail with one another, i.e. the conclusion *definitely* answers a question raised by the thesis.

All sentences and paragraphs successfully entail logically with one another, i.e. segues and transitions are rock solid.

Essay incorporates three relevant examples illustrating the writer’s theme and uses events from the movie to demonstrate.

Title page included but does not follow template *exactly*.

Thesis and concluding paragraphs *functionally* agree, i.e. the conclusion *somewhat* answers a question raised by the thesis.

All sentences and paragraphs entail with the *exception of one instance*, e.g. a segue or transition is rough or does not entail *or* an expected segue (idea) is omitted.

Essay incorporates three examples illustrating the writer’s theme but does not *consistently* use *relevant* events from the movie to demonstrate.

No title page included.

Thesis and concluding paragraphs *do not* agree.

All sentences and paragraphs entail logically with one another with the *exception of two instances*, e.g. a segue or transition is rough or does not entail *or* an expected segue (idea) is omitted.

Essay does not incorporate three relevant examples of selflessness.

