

A CREATIVE APPROACH TO THE CLASSICAL PROGYMNASMATA

Writing Rhetoric

THESIS PART 1

PAUL KORTEPETER



Writing & Rhetoric Book 10: Thesis Part 1

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Thesis Part I

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	v
A Typical Teaching Week	vii
Introduction to Students	xi
Introduction	xii
Best Foot Forward	
The <i>Progym</i> and the Practice of Modern Writing	xiv
Objectives for <i>Thesis Part 1</i>	xvi
Lesson 1: Quintilian and the Classical Ideal: First Strive for Goodness	1
Lesson 2: Of Thesis Statements, Disagreements, and Speculative Questions	17
Lesson 3: Audience and Antithesis	41
Lesson 4: The Thesis Essay, Part 1: Hooking the Audience	67
Lesson 5: The Thesis Essay, Part 2: Supporting the Thesis	91
Lesson 6: How to Be Appealing: Ethos, the Appeal to Authority	105
Lesson 7: First Thesis Essay: Analysis of a Short Story	141
Lesson 8: Second Thesis Essay: Analysis of an Autobiography	173
Lesson 9: Third Thesis Essay, Part 1: What Is Beauty?	213

Lesson 10: <i>Third Thesis Essay, Part 2: What Is Beauty?</i>	259
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Appendix: Sample Thesis Essay	285
Appendix: Thesis Essay Rubric (Simplified)	289
Thesis Essay Rubric (Detailed)	290
Get to the Point: Tips for Summarizing	293
Outlines: Your Very Own Story Maps	295
Elocution Electrifies	297
Glossary of Literary and Rhetorical Concepts	299
So Long	305

Foreword

One of the most promising aspects of classical education is that it can help revive civil public discourse. It can ignite thoughtful, courteous conversations between people about what we value most.

Unfortunately, many of us nowadays are strutting our disputes like roosters fanning our feathers. In the words of philosopher Charles Taylor, we have become a culture of “mutual display.” Showing off our opinions and shutting down those with whom we disagree has become more important than respectfully trying to win their hearts and minds. And this lack of civil discourse surely damages our society. Without kindness and respect, communication deteriorates into altercation. Without honoring our common cultural bonds, our nation disintegrates into cliques that focus on their own self-interest.

I have strong opinions. You have strong opinions. How do we come to a place where we can communicate respectfully? I would argue that to do this, civil conversation must be part of a child’s comprehensive education. It must be taught at dinner tables and at bedsides before parents turn out the lights. It must be taught in schools of every kind—public, private, and religious—and it must be consistently modeled by teachers in their classrooms. It will take intentionality to counter the loud and crass voices that flood pop culture, the media, and the halls of government.

One way that ancient teachers prepared to entrust civil society to the next generation, and to help young people enter the public discourse, was to teach rhetoric. Rhetoric is imperfect, and it can be misused. Certainly the adage is true: “Whoever does not study rhetoric will be a victim of it.” On the other hand, because it requires evidence, clarity, and ethical behavior as the support structure of an argument, rhetoric can help to create the kind of sustained and careful thinking that is needed for properly understanding the problems of our day.

Here, in the thesis exercise, all the best of rhetoric finds its full expression. The thesis essay and the thesis speech are, with little competition, two of the best ways to train our young people in civil communication and principled critical thinking. To those ends this book is dedicated.

A Typical Teaching Week

These guidelines are intended to help bring some predictability to lesson planning.

Although the elements of grammar are important aspects of this course, its primary focus is writing and rhetoric. We recommend that you teach a simple, but rich, grammar curriculum in parallel with the lessons in *Writing & Rhetoric: Thesis Part 1*. By simple, we mean to suggest that you avoid a grammar program with a writing component. Two different writing methods would most likely work against each other and cause an imbalance in the school day. Instead, look for a grammar program that focuses on grammatical concepts, provides plenty of practice sentences, and encourages diagramming.

You may want to provide same-day grammar instruction several days a week, preferably separating Writing & Rhetoric from grammar study by an hour or two. Or, you may want to alternate weeks between a grammar program and Writing & Rhetoric. This requires some negotiation in your language arts program for the year. If you aim to do two Writing & Rhetoric books per school year, that would equal approximately twenty lessons. The introductory lessons (1–6) each can be completed in a week. The essay-writing lessons (7–10) each may take two or three weeks to complete. You will have to choose a grammar program with this consideration in mind.

Please note that multiple opportunities for practice are built into the Writing & Rhetoric series. If you find that your students have mastered a particular form of writing, you should feel free to skip some lessons. In this case, some teachers choose to present the literature from skipped lessons as part of their history or English lessons. Some teachers may also provide their students with practice in summarizing, critical thinking, and sentence manipulation by doing only the Tell It Back, Talk About It, and Copiousness sections from skipped lessons.

The following table illustrates some possible options for scheduling lessons. As always with Writing & Rhetoric, teachers have the freedom to pick and choose the lesson elements, schedule, and pace that suits the needs of their classrooms. You can even schedule each lesson over two weeks if your students need the extra time.

Lessons 1–6, Option 1

Day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Read lesson introduction● Tell back (narrate or summarize) text (Tell It Back)● Engage in Talk About It discussions	Day 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Work on Write & Discuss exercise● Begin Go Deeper if time allows
Day 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Continue to work on Go Deeper	Day 4 (if needed) <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Finish Go Deeper

Lessons 1–6, Option 2

Day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Read part of lesson introduction, assign remainder for homework	Day 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Tell back (narrate or summarize) text (Tell It Back)● Engage in Talk About It discussions● Work on Write & Discuss exercise	
Day 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Begin Go Deeper	Day 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Continue to work on Go Deeper	Day 5 (if needed) <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Finish Go Deeper

Lessons 7–10, Option 1^A

Day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Read lesson introduction● Tell back (narrate or summarize) text (Tell It Back)● Annotate text if time allows, or assign for homework (Tell It Back)● Engage in Talk About It discussions	Day 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Work on readings and follow-up exercises (lesson 9) or Writing Time exercises (lessons 7–8, 10)	
Day 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Continue to work on readings and exercises or Writing Time exercises	Day 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Engage in Speak It exercises● Continue to work on readings and exercises or Writing Time exercises	Day 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Work through Revise It section

Lessons 7–10, Option 2

Day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Read part of lesson introduction, assign remainder for homework● Assign annotations for homework (Tell It Back)	Day 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Tell back (narrate or summarize) text (Tell It Back)● Engage in Talk About It discussions● Work on readings and follow-up exercises (lesson 9) or Writing Time exercises (lessons 7–8, 10)	
Day 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Continue to work on readings and exercises or Writing Time exercises	Day 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Engage in Speak It exercises● Continue to work on readings and exercises or Writing Time exercises	Day 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Work through Revise It section

^AThere will be some exceptions to these schedules in lessons 9 and 10 based on variations in their format. Teachers will need to adjust the schedule accordingly for those lessons.

Day One

1. The teacher models fluency by reading the introductory text aloud while students follow along silently. If the lesson introduction contains a longer reading, such as a short story or a biography, teachers may read part of the selection in class as a “teaser” and assign the remainder for homework, or simply assign the entire reading for homework.
2. Tell It Back and Talk About It should immediately follow the reading of the text, while the text is still fresh in the students’ minds. (In lesson 9 there are multiple Tell It Back and Talk About It sections that follow each reading. They should be completed at whatever pace the class goes through the readings. There is no Tell It Back or Talk About It work for lesson 10.) Annotation can be an important aid to memory for longer readings, and it is included under Tell It Back in certain lessons in this book as part of the reading process. If time allows, students can complete their annotations in class, or annotation can be assigned for homework. If the lesson reading is assigned as homework (see previous step), annotation also can be assigned for homework and teachers can engage students with Tell It Back and Talk About It the following day.

Narration, the process of “telling back,” can be done in a variety of ways. Pairs of students can retell the text to each other, or selected individuals can narrate orally to the entire class. Solo students can tell back the text into a recording device or to an instructor. Students in middle or high school are capable of written summary narrations, which is the focus in this book. Summary writing should be completed individually and then can be shared with the class as desired. At this age, narrative summaries, outlines, and dramatic reenactments can be done with skill.

The process of narration is intended to improve comprehension and long-term memory. Please note that oral narration, often emphasized for younger students, can still be useful for older students, particularly those who struggle with writing. If you prefer longer, in-depth oral narration to the written summary narrations in this book, please consider these tips:

- Avoid rereading a passage to students. Let them rely on the strength of their memories. Students will pay more attention if they know they will hear a passage only once and be expected to tell it back.
- Remember that oral narrations are typically detailed retellings in chronological order, complete with names, events, and rich vocabulary words.
- Ask other students to assist if the narrator falters in his or her retelling. Be sure, however, to give enough quiet space for the narrator to think clearly about what he or she has just heard. Don’t be hasty to jump in and “rescue” a narrator.

Annotation can help a student easily locate vocabulary words, proper nouns, and important concepts for drafting essays.

Talk About It is designed to help students analyze the meaning of their reading and to see analogous situations, both in the world and in their own lives. This book also includes several opportunities for picture analysis.

Days Two and Three

1. If some or all of the lesson reading was assigned for homework on day 1, Tell It Back and Talk About It can be completed on day 2. If only annotations were completed as homework, the teacher might engage students in conversations about the important ideas they underlined or the questions they jotted down in the margins.
2. In lessons 1–6, students will encounter the Write & Discuss exercise in which short writing assignments precede class discussions. Writing is always an excellent way to improve the quality of participation in any academic conversation. By giving students time to consider their answers on paper, teachers will find that even quiet and reticent students are more likely to engage in the discussion. Following Write & Discuss, students work with the text through the Go Deeper exercises. Go Deeper is all about practicing important skills essential to each lesson.

In lessons 7, 8, and 10, students will work through the Writing Time section, which includes copiousness and the thesis exercises themselves. You will probably want to take multiple days for this step.

Lesson 9 contains readings and comprehension exercises that will help students complete the thesis essay in lesson 10.

Day Four

1. Students may need the fourth day (or more) to complete the Go Deeper and Writing Time exercises (or the readings and exercises in lesson 9).

In lessons 7, 8, and 10, if students complete the first draft of their thesis essays by day 3, we recommend that they take a breather from writing while they work on their speaking skills. Keeping a day between essay completion and revision helps students to look at their work with fresh eyes. However, teachers may find it valuable to pair students together to read their essays out loud and give each other ideas for revision. A rubric is included at the back of the book as an aid to partner feedback or grading by teachers.

2. The Speak It section creates opportunities for students to memorize, recite, discuss and debate, and read dramatically. Please consider using a recording device whenever it suits the situation. When using electronics, students should listen to their recordings to get an idea of what sounds right and what needs to be improved. Have students read the elocution instructions at the back of the book to help them work on skill in delivery. Speak It does not appear in lessons 1–6 and 9, and no work is required on day 4 for those lessons.

Day Five

At this level, students will continue to work toward a foundation in revision. The Revise It section provides basic exercises that develop students' skills in revision and proofreading. Revise It also provides a list that covers some of the most important steps toward improving an essay. Most students can do moderate self-editing at this age and provide thoughtful feedback to each other. However, teachers are still the best source for giving editorial feedback and requesting rewrites. Revise It does not appear in lessons 1–6 and 9, and no work is required on day 5 for those lessons.

Introduction to Students

You may not realize it, but you've just walked into a gym. No, no—of course not the kind of gym where you pump iron. You won't be doing biceps curls, leg presses, and barbell lifts here! What I mean is that you've entered a writing gym. This is the place for you to do your sentence curls, your critical-thinking presses, and your composition lifts. It goes without saying that the more you lift weights, the stronger your muscles become. Similarly, the more you work out with pencil, pen, and keyboard, the stronger your writing muscles become.

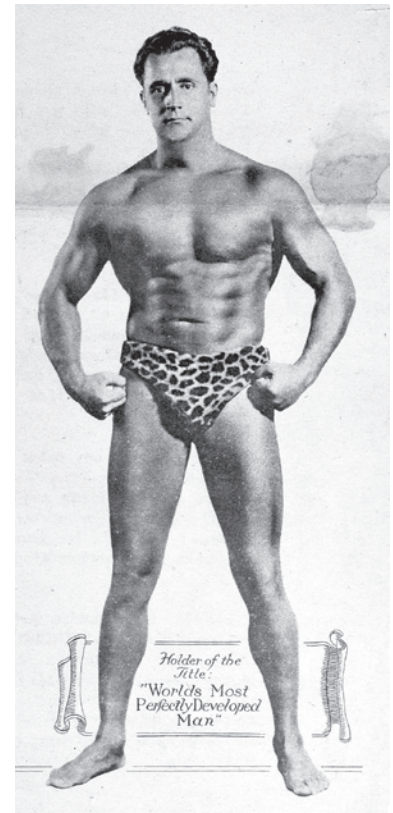
If you've been with us for a while, you know that these writing exercises are called the *progymnasmata*. They've been around for over 2,000 years, but nobody knows how ancient they really are.¹ They were created in the Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire and they were used by schools to train the best writers and teachers in all of Rome. You can see most of the word "gymnasium" in *progymnasmata*, which means "preliminary exercises."

Milo of Kroton knew the value of weight training some 2,500 years ago. He was a famous athlete who grew up in the Greek colony of Kroton, which was located in southern Italy. When he was just a kid, Milo decided that he could build his muscles by pumping beef . . . literally! He would walk around with a baby calf in his arms and lift that calf above his head. As the calf grew heavier, Milo kept lifting it. And as that calf grew into a full-sized bull, he still lifted it daily and his muscles grew stronger. No wonder Milo won six Olympic titles for wrestling! It was relatively easy to throw a man down when he could lug a bull around. That's what the legends tell us, anyway.

Instead of lugging around a growing bull, you have been writing compositions that grow in difficulty. Writing exercises such as these *progymnasmata* build from simple forms to more complex, and from concrete ideas to more abstract. In this series, you've written fables, narratives, chreias, refutations, confirmations, commonplaces, encomia, vituperations, comparisons, descriptions, impersonations, and now—ta dah!—at long last you've reached thesis. Thesis is the last stage of rippin' those writing muscles before you get to formal rhetoric! You could say that it's the supreme workout.

If this is your first time to join us in the gym, there's no better exercise to get started with than thesis. It brings together the four modes of writing and discourse—narration, description, exposition, and persuasion—and it strengthens your ability to make an argument, organize your thoughts, and supply evidence. Thesis works every one of your writing muscles! You've got two books ahead to learn all about thesis writing and why this essay form is so important to your life and your ability to communicate personally and professionally. Consider these books to be your personal trainers.

OK, so come on now, let's get those muscles working! Let's break a sweat. Let's make 'em burn!



▲ This is me, the author. Actually, this is Charles Atlas, the famous twentieth-century strongman. However, you can bet my writing muscles are every bit as developed.

"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" circa 1935. Image courtesy of Wellcome Images, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%22The_World%27s_Most_Perfectly_Developed_Man%22_Wellcome_L0027452.jpg.

1. The oldest surviving text of the *progymnasmata* dates back to the first century and was written by a teacher of rhetoric named Aelius Theon of Alexandria.

Introduction

Two thousand-plus years ago, the Greeks developed a system of persuasive speaking known as rhetoric. The Romans fell in love with rhetoric because it both was practical for the real world and served the need of training orators in their growing republic. In order to prepare their students for oration, the Romans invented a complementary system of persuasive writing known as the *progymnasmata*: *pro-* meaning “preliminary” and *gymnas* meaning “exercises.” The *progymnasmata* were the primary method used in Graeco-Roman schools to teach young people the elements of rhetoric. This happened in a grammar school (called a *grammaticus*) sometime around the age of ten for upper-class students.

There are several ancient “*progymns*” still in existence. The most influential *progymns* were by Hermogenes of Tarsus, who lived in the second century, and by Aphthonius of Antioch, who lived during the fourth century just as the western Roman Empire was collapsing. Even after the great cities of Rome lay in ruins, the *progym* continued as the primary method for teaching writing during the Middle Ages and even into early modern times.

The Writing & Rhetoric series is based on the *progymnasmata* of ancient Rome. This method assumes that students learn best by reading excellent examples of literature and by growing their writing skills through imitation. It is incremental, meaning that it goes from simpler exercises to more complex exercises, and it moves from the concrete to the abstract. One of the beauties of the *progym* is that it grows with the student through the stages of childhood development that are dubbed by modern classical educators as the “trivium,” a term borrowed from medieval education.¹ These exercises effectively take a young writer from the grammar phase through the logic phase and finally to the rhetoric phase.

In a democracy such as Athens or a republic such as Rome, rhetoric was a powerful way to enter into public conversations. In the words of Yale rhetorician Charles Sears Baldwin, “Rhetoric is conceived by Aristotle as the art of giving effectiveness to the truth.” He adds that “the true theory of rhetoric is the energizing of knowledge, the bringing of truth to bear upon men. . . .” Rhetoric thus had an intentional public purpose, that is, to persuade people to embrace truth and its corollaries: goodness and beauty. It was designed to enjoin right behavior by holding up to public scrutiny examples of virtue and wickedness. Of course, the person using rhetoric was also supposed to be virtuous—above all honest and just.

There is an urgency and a real purpose to rhetoric. It was never meant to be empty forms of speaking and composition. It was never meant to be only eloquence and skill of delivery. It was certainly never meant to be manipulative sound bites and commercials made to benefit an unscrupulous political or economic class. Rather, it was intended for every citizen as a means to engage articulately with the urgent ideas of the day. As the old saying goes, “Whoever does not learn rhetoric will be a victim of it.”

1. In medieval times, the trivium was originally the lower division of the seven liberal arts. For the modern idea that these studies correspond to childhood development, please refer to Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*.

The best preparation for rhetoric is still the *progymnasmata*, the preliminary exercises. In this book you will find these exercises creatively updated to meet the needs of modern children. We have embraced the method both as it was used for Roman youth and as it develops the skills demanded by contemporary education.

- It teaches the four modes of discourse—narration, exposition, description, and argumentation—while at the same time blending them for maximum persuasive impact.
- It is incremental, moving from easier forms to harder forms. The level of challenge is appropriate for students as they mature with the program.
- It uses “living” stories, from ancient to modern, and is not stuck in any particular time period. Rather, it follows a timeline of history so that the stories can be integrated with history lessons.
- Its stories engage the imagination and also spark a desire in young people to imitate them. In this way, Writing & Rhetoric avoids the “blank-page syndrome” that can paralyze many nascent writers by giving students a model from which to write.
- It promotes virtue by lifting up clear-cut examples of good and bad character.
- It fosters the joy of learning by providing opportunities for creative self-expression as well as classroom fun.
- It uses speaking to enhance the development of persuasive writing.
- It teaches students to recognize and use the three persuasive appeals to an audience: pathos, ethos, and logos.
- It provides opportunities for students to learn from other students’ work as well as to present their own work.

As educators, I think we need to admit that teaching writing is difficult. This is because writing makes big demands on cognitive function and, for many young writers, can easily become overwhelming. Our brains need to simultaneously

- utilize motor skills
- process vocabulary
- sequence and organize ideas
- employ grammatical concepts
- and draw upon a reservoir of good writing—hopefully the reservoir exists—as a template for new writing

That’s a tall order. Also, writing contains a subjective element. It’s not as clear-cut as math. And when you add argumentation to the mix, you have a very complex process indeed. To be properly educated, every person needs to be able to make and understand arguments.

It is from this list of complexities that a desire for a relatively easy-to-implement curriculum was born. While the task of teaching writing is difficult, it is my sincere belief that reconnecting the tree of modern composition to its classical roots in rhetoric will refresh the entire process. Regardless of your personal writing history, I trust that these books will provide a happy and rewarding experience for your students.



The *Progym* and the Practice of Modern Writing

Although the *progym* are an ancient method of approaching writing, they are extraordinarily relevant today. This is because modern composition developed from the *progym*. Modern writing borrows heavily from many of the *progym*'s various exercises. For example, modern stories are essentially unchanged from the ancient fable and narrative forms. Modern expository essays contain elements from the ancient commonplace, encomium/vituperation, and other *progym* exercises. Persuasive essays of today are basically the same as the ancient thesis exercises, although often (unfortunately) missing the robust challenge of antithesis. In this series, you can expect your students to grow in all forms of modern composition—narrative, expository, descriptive, and persuasive—while at the same time developing unique rhetorical muscle.

The *progym* cover many elements of a standard English and Language Arts curriculum. In *Thesis Part 1* these include:²

- experiencing both the reading of a story (sight) and listening to it (hearing)
- identifying a variety of genres, including description, history, short story, biography, and autobiography
- determining the meaning of words and phrases, including figures of speech, as they are used in a text
- increasing knowledge of vocabulary by considering word meaning, word order, and transitions
- analyzing text that is organized in sequential or chronological order
- demonstrating an understanding of texts by annotating, summarizing, and paraphrasing in ways that maintain meaning and logical order within a text
- gathering relevant information from multiple sources, and annotating sources
- drawing evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research
- articulating an understanding of ideas or images communicated by the literary work
- establishing a central idea or topic
- composing a topic sentence and creating an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped into coherent paragraphs to support the writer's purpose
- supporting claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources, facts, and details
- writing informative (explanatory) and descriptive texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly

2. This list was derived from the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Title 19, Part II, Chapter 110: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for English Language Arts and Reading (<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/index.html>), the Core Knowledge Foundation's Core Knowledge Sequence: Content and Skill Guidelines for Grades K-8 (http://www.coreknowledge.org/mimik/mimik_uploads/documents/480/CKFSequence_Rev.pdf), the English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/elacontentstnds.pdf>), the English Language Arts Standards of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>), the English/Language Arts Standards Grade 6, Indiana Department of Education (<http://www.doe.in.gov/standards/englishlanguage-arts>), and the English Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools, Grade 7 (http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2010/stds_all_english.pdf).

- developing the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples
- providing a concluding statement or section that follows from the topic presented
- using precise language and domain-specific vocabulary
- using appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts
- producing clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
- avoiding plagiarism through summary
- with some guidance and support from peers and adults, developing and strengthening writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach
- using technology as an aid to revision and oration
- using pictures and photos to analyze and interpret the past
- participating civilly and productively in group discussions

While these standards are certainly worthwhile and are addressed in this curriculum, the *progym* derive their real strength from the incremental and thorough development of each form of writing. The Writing & Rhetoric series does not skip from form to form and leave the others behind. Rather, it builds a solid foundation of mastery by blending the forms. For example, no expository essay can truly be effective without description. No persuasive essay can be convincing without narrative. All good narrative writing requires description, and all good persuasive writing requires expository elements. Not only do the *progym* demand strong organization and implement many of the elements of modern language arts, but they also retain all of the power of classical rhetoric.

Here is how the *progym* develop each stage of modern composition:

1. Fable—Narrative
2. Narrative—Narrative with descriptive elements
3. Chreia & Proverb—Expository essay with narrative, descriptive, and persuasive elements
4. Refutation & Confirmation—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
5. Commonplace—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
6. Encomium & Vituperation—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
7. Comparison—Comparative essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
8. Description & Impersonation—Descriptive essay with narrative, expository, persuasive, and comparative elements
9. Thesis Part 1—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, expository, and comparative elements
10. Thesis Part 2—Persuasive speech with narrative, descriptive, expository, and comparative elements, as well as the three rhetorical appeals
11. Declamation—Persuasive essay or speech that marshals all the elements of the *progym* and brings them to bear upon judicial matters

As you can see, the *progym* move quickly to establish the importance of one form to another.

Objectives for *Thesis Part 1*

The following are some of the major objectives for the exercises found in each section of this book:

Reading

1. Expose students to narrative, autobiographical, and philosophical writing.
2. Model fluent reading for students and give them practice reading diverse texts.
3. Aid student reading and recall by teaching techniques for annotation.
4. Facilitate student interaction with well-written texts through discussions and exercises in evaluation and critical thinking.

Writing

1. Enhance research skills by giving students multiple texts to read and having them summarize and create a topic from the material.
2. Support the development of invention (inventing topics and ideas to write about).
3. Grow awareness of different types of audiences along with the purpose of the author.
4. Introduce a wide variety of essay “hooks” to help capture audience attention.
5. Encourage students to map (prewrite) their information before they write a paragraph.
6. Strengthen descriptive capabilities with an emphasis on specific, vivid words and sensorial language.
7. Support students in writing thesis essays focused on literary and thematic analysis, as well as on answering the speculative question, “What is beauty?” These essays include the development of an awareness of transitions, tone, and writing style.
8. Practice writing theses, topic sentences, and antitheses.
9. Improve conclusions so that they extend and enhance the original thesis.
10. Strengthen the skill of deriving information from texts and organizing and summarizing it in expository paragraphs.
11. Continue the development of revision, proofreading, and joint critiquing.
12. Grow awareness of the stylistic vices of redundancy, padding, mixing formal and informal language, dangling modifiers, and faulty predication.
13. Increase understanding of formal and informal language.
14. Reinforce grammatical concepts.

Related Concepts

1. Aid in the development of vocabulary and analysis of language.
2. Strengthen students’ power of observation.
3. Reinforce the ability to summarize and paraphrase, as well as to amplify through description, for greater rhetorical flexibility.
4. Strengthen working memory through recitation (*memoria*), thus improving storage of information and rhetorical power.
5. Increase understanding of the flexibility and copiousness of language by practicing sentence variety.

Speaking

1. Strengthen students’ oratory skills by providing opportunities for public speaking and for working on delivery—volume, pacing, and inflection.
2. Practice tone and inflection by means of dramatic reading.
3. Encourage students to see the relationship between writing and speaking as they consider their ideas orally and to use oration as an aid to the process of revision.



Lesson 1

Quintilian and the Classical Ideal: First Strive for Goodness

Rhetoric is the art of writing and speaking persuasively. Having mastery of rhetoric is like having a superpower. It may not be as dramatic as bulletproof skin or a Jedi mind trick, but it will help you to influence how some people think and how other people act. Of course, that influence can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on who's using it.

One of the earliest philosophers of rhetoric, Aristotle (384–322 BC), recognized that rhetorical powers could be useful for defending truth and justice in public discussions. He also believed that a master rhetorician could persuade difficult audiences to believe his arguments by appealing to his own good character and by stirring up emotions. Old Aristotle believed so strongly in the usefulness of rhetoric that he wrote an instruction manual about how to become a rhetorical master and dubbed it—you guessed it—*Rhetoric*.

At the same time, Aristotle acknowledged that some people might use rhetorical powers to harm and manipulate others. “One who uses such power of speech unjustly might do great harm . . . ,” he declared.¹ However, he added that any good thing—strength or health, wealth or leadership—can also be used for evil purposes. Although these things can be abused, Aristotle

1. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, The Internet Classics Archive, accessed January 19, 2018, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.1.i.html>.

asserts that individuals “can confer the greatest of benefits by a right use of these.”² As the Romans used to say, “*Abusus non tollit usum*”: The abuse of something is not an argument against its proper use. Indeed, Aristotle believed that, even though rhetoric could be abused and misused, mastering the art of rhetoric was very important. He said, “It is absurd to hold that a man ought to be ashamed of being unable to defend himself with his limbs, but not of being unable to defend himself with speech and reason.”³

In other words, people should value the ability to defend themselves with rhetoric just as much as they value the ability to use their arms and legs to fend off a physical attack.

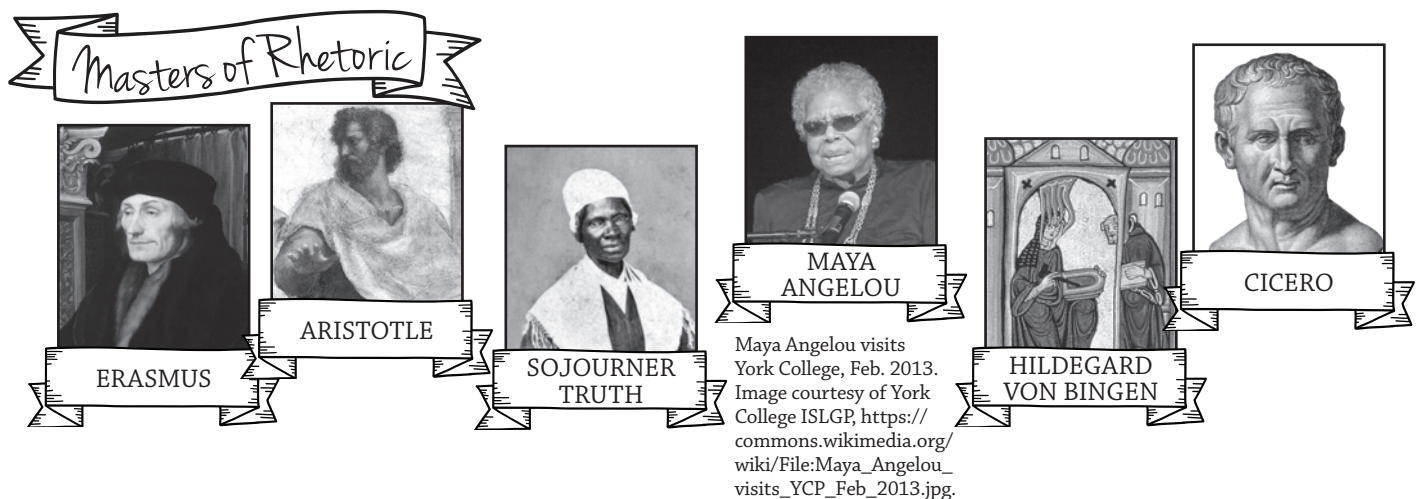
Flash forward a few hundred years after Aristotle to the first-century Roman Empire. It was then that one of the greatest teachers of all time, Quintilian, trained his students to be top-notch persuaders. He believed that the best thing any school could do for a young person was to make him an amazing orator. Like Aristotle, Quintilian thought it was absurd for anyone to give up using rhetoric simply because it could be misused. He joked, “Let us give up eating, it often makes us ill; let us never go inside houses, for sometimes they collapse on their occupants; let never a sword be forged for a soldier, since it might be used by a robber.”⁴ Rather, Quintilian said it was a useful and worthwhile task

for a good [person] to defend his friends, to guide the senate by his counsels, and to lead peoples or armies to follow his bidding. . . . Is it not a noble thing, by employing the understanding which is common to mankind and the words that are



▲ The dark side: Rhetoric can be misused.

Mansudae Grand Monument, April 29, 2010. Image courtesy of John Pavelka, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mansudae_Grand_Monument_\(4610364189\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mansudae_Grand_Monument_(4610364189).jpg).



2. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*.

3. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*.

4. Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, trans. Harold Edgeworth Butler (Loeb Classical Library, 1920–1922), bk. 2, chap. 16, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Quintilian/Institutio_Oratoria/home.html.

used by all, to win such honor and glory that you seem not to speak or plead, but rather, as was said of Pericles,⁵ to thunder and lighten?⁶

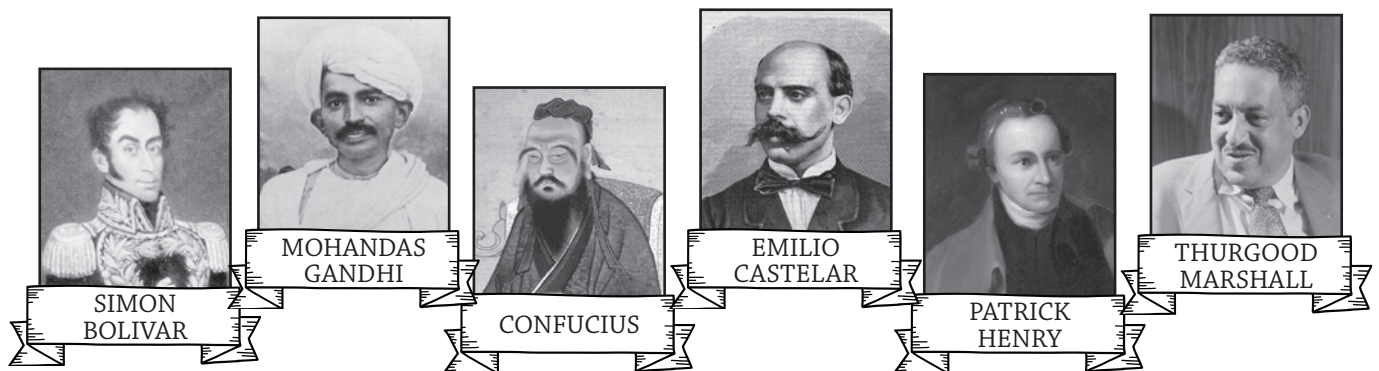
Note that different cultures and people groups have differing ideas about what it means to be good. The Roman idea of goodness, as explained by Quintilian, emphasizes some slightly different aspects of goodness than some of the world's great religions. For instance, Judaism and Christianity emphasize selflessness and charity in addition to the virtues that Quintilian thought of as goodness.

Wow. Quintilian implies that with rhetoric our words can be as powerful as thunder and lightning! But don't miss that he said that rhetoric was good when it was used by "a good person." Without mincing words, he says, "I hold that no one can be a true orator unless he is also a good [person]."⁷

What did Quintilian mean by "a good person"? More than likely he meant someone who worked to develop within herself the solid Roman virtues of courage, self-control, generosity, justice, piety, and wisdom. There are many different opinions about what makes a person good, but the bottom line is that Quintilian felt it was important to use rhetoric for the good of others.

When a person who strives for goodness writes or speaks, rhetoric can become a significant power to bring about good ends. What about you? Do you strive for goodness?

More than likely you'll say "yes," and you probably already have many qualities that are good. Yet developing goodness doesn't happen all at once. It is the study of a lifetime, and a young person such as yourself may have a lot of learning and growing left to do when it comes to goodness. In fact, too often people think that they are better than they really are, and that misbelief can get in the way of developing goodness. A professor at Princeton University asked his students what their position on slavery would have been if they had been white and living in the South before abolition. Guess what? According to this professor, the students all claimed they would have been abolitionists!



5. Pericles (c. 495–429): the renowned statesman and leader of Athens during its Golden Age

6. Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, bk. 2, chap. 16.

7. Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, bk. 1, chap. 2.

They all would have bravely spoken out against slavery, and worked tirelessly in the cause of freeing those enslaved. . . .

Of course, it is complete nonsense. Only the tiniest fraction of them, or of any of us, would have spoken up against slavery or lifted a finger to free the slaves. Most of them—and us—would simply have gone along. Many would have supported the slave system and, if it was in their interest, participated in it as buyers and owners or sellers of slaves.

So I respond to the students' assurances that they would have been vocal opponents of slavery by saying that I will credit their claims if they can show me evidence of the following: that in leading their lives today they have embraced causes that are unpopular among their peers and stood up for the rights of victims of injustice whose very humanity is denied, and where they have done so knowing (1) that it would make THEM unpopular with their peers, (2) that they would be loathed and ridiculed by wealthy, powerful, and influential individuals and institutions in our society, (3) that it would cost them friendships and cause them to be abandoned and even denounced by many of their friends, (4) that they would be called nasty names, and (5) that they would possibly even be denied valuable educational and professional opportunities as a result of their moral witness.

In short, my challenge to them is to show me where they have at significant risk to themselves and their futures stood up for a cause that is unpopular in elite sectors of our culture today.⁸

To put it bluntly, very few people would actually risk their popularity, their money, their friendships, their education, or their opportunities in order to take an unpopular stand. In other words, we often are not as good as we think we are, and recognizing this should motivate us to keep working at developing goodness. Taking an unpopular stand requires serious courage and other virtues as well: determination, for instance, and sound judgment and prudence. Just as mastering rhetoric takes time and practice, so does developing those virtues. It is more of a journey than an arrival.

No one ever becomes perfectly good and has nothing left to work on. You must constantly, deliberately own up to your weaknesses and actively support what is noble and right. In this way, your life will be held up to an honest mirror similar to the one in the story of Snow White. You may say, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, am I improving after all?" And the mirror may say back, "Oh, Man (or Oh, Woman), in this life you won't arrive; the vital thing is that you strive." Or it might dispense with the rhyme and tell you bluntly, "You were really kind to that elderly woman yesterday, but then afterward you bragged about it to your friends. Let's work on a little humility now." Throughout all your days, your mirror will keep saying, "You can still improve," but perhaps you

8. Robert P. George, Facebook, August 17, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/robert.p.george.39/posts/10212810047458661>. Used by permission of the author.

can also say back to it, “You’re right. I’m not yet perfectly good. I still have room to grow, but I am living well along the way.”

One of the purposes of these books, these *progymnasmata*, is to give you the tools for influencing others—for example, to stand up for what you believe in. When the time comes for you to take a stand, you will need to be able to express yourself clearly in writing or speech. The thesis essay is really the highest height of the *progymnasmata* because it can marshal every skill that came before it to make the strongest case for your ideas. You’ve made the climb and you’ve reached the pinnacle! But please remember: While you are learning to master rhetoric, to influence others, you must also strive to develop goodness, so that your influence is used for the good of others.

Narcissism

Nowadays it seems as though there are a lot of young people who are obsessed with their images—posting a bazillion selfies online; fixating on diet, clothes, celebrities; snapping photos back and forth. While it’s not necessarily bad to take selfies or think about how you look, being obsessed with doing those things can lead to excessive self-love, which is also known as narcissism. Narcissism can lead people to believe that they are better than they really are, that they don’t need to strive to improve. A professor of psychology in California recently surveyed thousands of students and found that 30 percent were narcissistic, a 15 percent leap from 1982!⁹ This rapid growth in narcissism among young people is a cause for concern for the health of our American culture.

Most people like to see themselves in the best possible light, and that’s perfectly natural. However, we must be on guard against thinking we are good (and special and remarkable) without questioning whether or not this assessment is based on reality. We must be on guard against the kind of thinking that leads us to use powerful tools such as rhetoric for our own selfish purposes, such as winning admiration or building power, rather than for the good of others. By working to develop the qualities of goodness, we can help ourselves to avoid the pitfalls of narcissistic thinking.



9. Jean M. Twenge and Joshua D. Foster, “Birth Cohort Increases in Narcissistic Personality Traits Among American College Students, 1982–2009,” *Psychology Today*, accessed June 8, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/files/attachments/4330/npitimeupdatespps.pdf>.

Tell It Back—Summary



This icon points to more tips on summarizing at the back of the book.

Summarize aloud three or four important ideas in this lesson. Then, in the space provided, write one well-crafted sentence that tells the main idea of the lesson as best as you understand it. To arrive at the main idea, ask yourself, “What is the chief purpose of the lesson?”

Main idea:

Talk About It—

1. Anne Shirley of *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery asks the question, “Which would you rather be if you had the choice—divinely beautiful or dazzlingly clever or angelically good?” If you had to choose one of those qualities, which would it be and why? Why do teachers of rhetoric care about whether or not a person wants to be good?

2. The word “narcissism” means “excessive self-love.” The word is derived from a Greek myth about a handsome young man named Narcissus who rudely rejected all of his suitors, including the mountain nymph Echo. As punishment for his conceit, he was fated to fall in love with his own reflection on the surface of a pond. There he lay on the grassy bank, staring into his own two eyes, pining to embrace himself, until he withered away and died. Rhetoricians say that people must desire goodness and be concerned for the good of others. How does narcissism undermine the goodness demanded by the practice of rhetoric? What do you think happens to friendships and other important relationships in the life of a person who is a narcissist?



▲ *Echo and Narcissus* by John William Waterhouse

3. Can you think of a situation or issue today in which it would be very costly to an individual if he or she were to take an unpopular stand?

Write & Discuss—

We find the following reflection in the Jewish book of moral teachings entitled *Chapters of the Fathers*, or *Pirkei Avot*:

Who is wise?

He who learns from everyone.

Who is strong?

He who conquers himself.

Who is rich?

He who is content with his lot.

Who is honorable?

He who treats all men honorably.¹⁰



Throughout the ages, rhetoric has demanded that its practitioners be people who strive after goodness. The *Pirkei Avot* contains some universal ideas defining goodness in human beings: wisdom, self-control, contentment, and honor.

What would you say are the qualities of a good person? Think carefully about an individual from history or from your own experience whom you respect and admire. Then take fifteen minutes to write down your thoughts about the qualities of goodness and how those qualities are expressed in that particular person. After that, share your thoughts with your teacher or with a partner, and try to arrive at a description of a person who strives for goodness—the kind of person who would use the skills of rhetoric for good purposes. Write your description in the space provided.

Observations of the individual:

10. The words of Simon Ben Zoma from *Pirkei Avot*, chapter 4. The full text of this book can be found at https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/680274/jewish/Pirkei-Avot-Ethics-of-the-Fathers.htm.

Description of a person who strives for goodness:

Go Deeper—



1. **SUMMARY, MAIN IDEA, AND DEFINITION**—One of the fascinating things about folktales and fairy tales is that they entertain us at the same time that they teach us lessons about life. We learn to avoid talking to strangers from “Little Red Riding Hood.” We learn not to make rash promises from “Rumpelstiltskin.” We learn that looks can be deceiving from “Beauty and the Beast.” We learn that it’s important to use our wits from “Hansel and Gretel.”

Perhaps even more important than these moral lessons, which are similar to the lessons taught by fables, is the clear picture of good and evil that we get from many folk- and fairy tales. We know pretty quickly which characters are decent and kind, and we know which characters are harmful. This clear picture of good and evil—along with the way good characters are rewarded—helps children tilt toward wanting to live a good life.

Look at the following short tales. For each one, summarize the tale, as instructed, in the space provided. Then identify and write down the tale’s main idea and describe how each tale defines goodness or wickedness. (Keep in mind that most narratives are subject to interpretation and there may be more than one suitable main idea or definition of goodness or wickedness. If you compare your answer with the answers of your classmates, you may be surprised by the variety of perspectives.)

Summary vs. Main Idea—What’s the Difference?

A summary is a shortened, condensed version of a piece of writing. The main idea is the most important thought that comes out of the writing. For example, look at the following summary and main idea for “The Tortoise and the Hare”:

Summary: In a race between a slow-moving tortoise and a fast-running hare, the tortoise crosses the finish line first by persevering toward the goal.

Main idea: Success depends on persistence.

Example:

“Odds and Ends,” a German Tale

There was once upon a time a maiden who was pretty, but idle and negligent. When she had to spin she was so out of temper that if there was a little knot in the flax, she at once pulled out a whole heap of it, and strewed it about on the ground beside her. Now she had a servant who was industrious, and gathered together the bits of flax which were thrown away, cleaned them, [spun] them fine, and had a beautiful gown made out of them for herself. A young man had wooed the lazy girl, and the wedding was to take place. On the eve of the wedding, the industrious one was dancing merrily about in her pretty dress, and the bride said,—“Ah, how that girl does jump about, dressed in my odds and ends.” The bridegroom heard that, and asked the bride what she meant by it. Then she told him that the girl was wearing a dress [made] of the flax which she had thrown away. When the bridegroom heard that, and saw how idle she was, and how industrious the poor girl was, he gave her up and went to the other, and chose her as his wife.¹¹

Tip: Use quotation marks to punctuate the title of a short story, short poem, TV episode, or essay. Italicize or underline the title of a longer work, such as a book, movie, play, TV show, or collection of poems, stories, or essays.

- a. Summarize the tale “Odds and Ends” in one sentence.

In “Odds and Ends,” a bridegroom nearly marries a spoiled, lazy maiden, but marries her servant instead when he discovers that the hardworking servant made a dress out of discarded flax.

- b. State the main idea of the tale in one sentence.

Hard work and thrift, rather than beauty and idleness, receive a reward.

- c. How does the tale define goodness?

“Odds and Ends” defines goodness as working hard and making the best of your situation in life.

A. “The Star-Money,” a German Tale

There was once on a time a little girl whose father and mother were dead, and she was so poor that she no longer had any little room to live in, or bed to sleep in, and at last she had nothing else but the clothes she was wearing and a little bit of bread in her hand which some charitable soul had given her. She was, however, good and pious.

And as she was thus forsaken by all the world, she went forth into the open country, trusting in the good God. Then a poor man met her, who said, “Ah, give me something to eat, I am so hungry!” She reached him the whole of her piece of bread, and

11. The Brothers Grimm, “Odds and Ends,” in *Household Tales*, trans. Margaret Hunt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884; Project Gutenberg, 2004), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5314/5314-8.txt>.

said, "May God bless it to thy use," and went onwards. Then came a child who moaned and said, "My head is so cold, give me something to cover it with." So she took off her hood and gave it to him; and when she had walked a little farther, she met another child who had no jacket and was frozen with cold. Then she gave it her own; and a little farther on one begged for a frock, and she gave away that also. At length she got into a forest and it had already become dark, and there came yet another child, and asked for a little shirt, and the good little girl thought to herself, "It is a dark night and no one sees thee, thou canst very well give thy little shirt away," and took it off, and gave away that also.

And as she so stood, and had not one single thing left, suddenly some stars from heaven fell down, and they were nothing else but hard smooth pieces of money, and although she had just given her little shirt away, she had a new one which was of the very finest linen. Then she gathered together the money into this, and was rich all the days of her life.¹²

a. Summarize the tale "The Star-Money" in one sentence.

b. State the main idea of the tale in one sentence.

c. How does the tale define goodness?

B. **"How the Wicked Sons Were Duped," an Indian Tale**

A very wealthy old man, imagining that he was on the point of death, sent for his sons and divided his property among them. However, he did not die for several years afterwards; and miserable years many of them were. Besides the weariness of old age, the old fellow had to bear with much abuse and cruelty from his sons. Wretched, selfish ingrates! Previously they vied with one another in trying to please their father, hoping thus to receive more money, but now they had received their patrimony,¹³ they cared

12. The Brothers Grimm, "The Star-Money," in *Household Tales*, trans. Margaret Hunt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884; Project Gutenberg, 2004), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5314/5314-8.txt>.

13. patrimony: inheritance from one's father

not how soon he left them—nay, the sooner the better, because he was only a needless trouble and expense. And they let the poor old man know what they felt.

One day he met a friend and related to him all his troubles. The friend sympathized very much with him, and promised to think over the matter, and call in a little while and tell him what to do. He did so; in a few days he visited the old man and put down four bags full of stones and gravel before him.

“Look here, friend,” said he. “Your sons will get to know of my coming here to-day, and will inquire about it. You must pretend that I came to discharge a long-standing debt with you, and that you are several thousands of rupees¹⁴ richer than you thought you were. Keep these bags in your own hands, and on no account let your sons get to them as long as you are alive. You will soon find them change their conduct towards you. Salaam.¹⁵ I will come again soon to see how you are getting on.”

When the young men got to hear of this further increase of wealth they began to be more attentive and pleasing to their father than ever before. And thus they continued to the day of the old man’s demise, when the bags were greedily opened, and found to contain only stones and gravel!¹⁶

a. Summarize the tale “How the Wicked Sons Were Duped” in three sentences.

b. State the main idea of the tale in one sentence.

c. How does the tale define wickedness?

14. rupee: the basic money unit of India, Pakistan, and Nepal

15. Salaam: a greeting and farewell that means “peace”

16. “How the Wicked Sons Were Duped,” in *Indian Fairy Tales*, ed. Joseph Jacobs (London: David Nutt, 1892; Project Gutenberg, 2003), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7128/7128-h/7128-h.htm>.

C. **“The Old Man and His Grandson,” a German Tale**

There was once a very old man, whose eyes had become dim, his ears dull of hearing, his knees trembled, and when he sat at table he could hardly hold the spoon, and spilt the broth upon the table-cloth or let it run out of his mouth. His son and his son’s wife were disgusted at this, so the old grandfather at last had to sit in the corner behind the stove, and they gave him his food in an earthenware bowl, and not even enough of it. And he used to look towards the table with his eyes full of tears. Once, too, his trembling hands could not hold the bowl, and it fell to the ground and broke. The young wife scolded him, but he said nothing and only sighed. Then they bought him a wooden bowl for a few pennies, out of which he had to eat.

They were once sitting thus when the little grandson of four years old began to gather together some bits of wood upon the ground. “What are you doing there?” asked the father. “I am making a little trough,” answered the child, “for father and mother to eat out of when I am big.”

The man and his wife looked at each other for a while, and presently began to cry. Then they took the old grandfather to the table, and henceforth always let him eat with them, and likewise said nothing if he did spill a little of anything.¹⁷

a. Summarize the tale “The Old Man and His Grandson” in three sentences.

b. State the main idea of the tale in one sentence.

c. How does the tale define goodness?

17. The Brothers Grimm, “The Old Man and His Grandson,” in *Household Tales*, trans. Margaret Hunt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884; Project Gutenberg, 2004), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5314/5314-8.txt>.

D. **“The Miraculous Cow,” a Filipino Tale**

There was once a farmer driving home from his farm in his cart. He had tied his cow to the back, as he was accustomed to do every evening on his way home. While he was going along the road, two boys saw him. They were Felipe and Ambrosio. Felipe whispered to Ambrosio, “Do you see the cow tied to the back of that cart? Well, if you will untie it, I will take it to our house.”

Ambrosio approached the cart slowly, and untied the cow. He handed the rope to Felipe, and then tied himself in the place of the animal.

“Come on, Ambrosio! Don’t be foolish! Come on with me!” whispered Felipe impatiently.

“No, leave me alone! Go home, and I will soon be there!” answered the cunning Ambrosio.

After a while the farmer happened to look back. What a surprise for him! He was frightened to find a boy instead of his cow tied to the cart. “Why are you there? Where is my cow?” he shouted furiously. “Rascal, give me my cow!”

“Oh, don’t be angry with me!” said Ambrosio. “Wait a minute, and I will tell you my story. Once, when I was a small boy, my mother became very angry with me. She cursed me, and suddenly I was transformed into a cow; and now I am changed back into my own shape. It is not my fault that you bought me: I could not tell you not to do so, for I could not speak at the time. Now, generous farmer, please give me my freedom! for I am very anxious to see my old home again.”

The farmer did not know what to do, for he was very sorry to lose his cow. When he reached home, he told his wife the story. Now, his wife was a kind-hearted woman; so, after thinking a few minutes, she said, “Husband, what can we do? We ought to set him free. It is by the great mercy of God that he has been restored to his former self.”

So the wily boy got off. He rejoined his friend, and they had a good laugh over the two simple folks.

The next day the farmer went to the market to buy a new cow and found his own cow for sale. He grieved at his own foolishness and vowed to thrash the boys if he ever saw them again.¹⁸

a. Summarize the tale “The Miraculous Cow” in two sentences.

18. Adapted from “The Miraculous Cow,” in *Filipino Popular Tales*, ed. Dean S. Fansler (Lancaster, PA: American Folklore Society, 1921; Project Gutenberg, 2008), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8299/8299-h/8299-h.htm>.

b. State the main idea of the tale in one sentence.

c. How does the tale define wickedness?

2. **AMPLIFICATION**—When we give readers a chance to enter more fully into an experience, they often become more open to our ideas. Amplification can do exactly that—help readers enter into an experience—by making a story richer with detail. Good rhetoric requires good storytelling.

The story in this exercise is a tale from China that warns the reader to treat people kindly, to protect them, and to avoid assuming the worst about them. You will see that this story, like some of the tales in the previous exercise, teaches about goodness by showing what goodness is not—by describing wickedness in action. After you read it over, rewrite the story in the space provided, adding dialogue and description that would enhance your audience’s enjoyment of the story and help them to better understand what you think the story is saying about goodness.

- You can use vivid, descriptive words to:
 - more fully describe the farmers
 - more fully describe the settings of the field and the temple
 - more fully describe the storm
- You can go into more detail about the wicked background of the farmers or help your audience better understand the “mind” of the lightning.
- You can use dialogue to:
 - give more details about the actions and motives of the farmers
 - enhance the personality and character of several of the farmers



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19. *The Chinese Fairy Book*, ed. Dr. R. Wilhelm, trans. Frederick H. Martens (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1921; Project Gutenberg, 2009), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29939/29939-h/29939-h.htm>.





Lesson 2

Of Thesis Statements, Disagreements, and Speculative Questions

You'll come across the word "thesis" in this book about as often as you'll come across the word "burger" at a fast food joint. When we use the word "thesis," it will mean one of two things:

1. a thesis statement—the main idea or argument of an essay, oration, or discussion
2. a **thesis essay**—a persuasive paper that defends a thesis statement

Now, don't let your eyes glaze over! To be honest, your pulse should be quickening, your knees should be getting wobbly, and you should have butterflies in your tummy. No, you're not about to fall in love. Rather, you're about to learn about two of the most important ways to communicate in your life as a student. The thesis statement and the thesis essay—these are the fireworks of rhetoric!

The Thesis Statement—

One way that you can argue more effectively, or go deeper in your thinking, is to advance a thesis statement. Depending on the type of paper you are writing, some thesis statements merely explain a subject, such as jazz or photosynthesis or appendicitis. Other thesis statements analyze



Our English word “thesis” comes from the Greek *thesis*, which means a “setting down” or “something set down.” This comes from the verb *tithenai*, which means “to put, set down.” It is very similar to the Latinate word “proposition” from the Latin *proponere*, which means “to put before.” When we present a thesis, we put or set forth a claim.

topics, such as hunting or plastic surgery or lottery games, in an essay that breaks down the topic and weighs its pluses and minuses. The thesis statement in a persuasive paper is a little different. It is still the main idea of the essay, but it makes a claim that can be argued and tries to persuade the audience that the claim is right. This is how old Aristotle or Cicero or Aphthonius would have used a thesis statement. In other words, using a thesis as the main argument of a paper is a classic idea. Here’s an example of a persuasive thesis:

Due to high expenses and frequent injuries, football should be dropped as a high school sport.

Now, a fair number of people might agree with this statement, but quite a few football fans would disagree. The beauty of a thesis is that you can make a case for it—argue for it—to help you win your audience to your side. It is not a simple factual statement such as “Water is wet” or “Purple is a color.” A thesis statement requires support to back it up.

Unless I’m mistaken, you already have some practice at making a case. Most people have considerable experience arguing for the things they want. When you urge your dad or mom to go out to eat or watch a particular movie, you are most likely making some sort of attempt at an argument. (Keep in mind that an argument is different than a quarrel. An argument is a clear line of thinking aimed at proving a point. A quarrel is any sharp or angry disagreement.) So let’s say that you want to make the case for eating out tonight, but you haven’t really thought about it too carefully. You put forth your thesis:

“I’m hungry.”

No, that’s not a thesis—or at least it’s not a *persuasive* thesis. It’s a statement of fact; it really can’t be argued. Also, it’s not clear about what you really want: to eat out. You try again.

“Can we go out to eat tonight?”

Again, not a thesis. A question is not a statement. You try again.

“I’ve been dreaming of sushi.”

Nice try. Although this attempt is another statement, it’s a fuzzy statement that can’t be argued. You haven’t even mentioned your purpose yet, which is to go out to eat.

“We should go out for sushi.”

Now that’s a clear and debatable statement! If you want to make it even more persuasive, you could include supporting details and reasons for the statement: “We should go out for sushi because it offers health benefits and a taste experience that can’t be matched by the food in our refrigerator.”

OK, now that's a solid thesis statement! Although it is expressed with all the force of a statement of fact, the sentence really needs some support to carry the day. In other words, it is a statement that could be argued. Your parents could agree *or* disagree with you. To make your case, you will need to be able to explain how sushi offers taste and health benefits when compared to the grub that's currently in the fridge. You will need to support your statement in such a way that your parents will take your idea seriously.

Of course, parents have every right to override suggestions from their children with counterarguments, or to provide no explanation at all. Please don't get the impression that I'm saying it's OK to nag your mom and dad. But knowing how to express your desires or opinions by using and supporting a thesis can help you to clarify your thinking and improve your discussions with your parents—and anyone else as well.

Word Roots!

The word “statement” is derived from the Latin *sto*, *stare* (I stand, to stand). A statement is a declaration of the status of something, declaring “how things stand.”

The Nature of Disagreement—

Think about all the disagreements you can have—such as whether or not to go out to dinner—in a small family or circle of friends and then extend those disagreements to the big family we call humanity. We are surrounded by disagreement!

There's an old Jewish proverb that goes, “Whenever there are two people in a room, there are three opinions.” And then there's this Yiddish¹ joke:

Two men come to their rabbi² to settle a dispute. One man holds one opinion while the other man holds exactly the opposite opinion. So the rabbi listens patiently to the first man. After he finishes, the rabbi exclaims, “You're right!” But the second man jumps in and tells his side of the story. When he's done, the rabbi cries, “And you're right, too!” A bystander who has listened to the whole dispute breaks in and says, “What's wrong with you, rabbi? They're arguing two totally different sides! They can't both be right!” To which the rabbi replies, “You're right!”

Both proverb and joke illustrate the fact that people don't agree perfectly on anything. Not a single belief held by one person hasn't been disputed by another person. Does this prove there aren't any right or wrong answers? No. It only proves that the thoughts of people are all over the map.

The reasons for our disagreements are many. We live in diverse cultures. We have conflicting sources of information. Some people think more logically while others think more emotionally. We take selfish positions; we take selfless positions. Some speak from deep knowledge; others speak from ignorance. Finally, for some inexplicable reason, human beings like to disagree. We love to dispute, to debate, to bump heads.

1. Yiddish: a language fusion of German, Hebrew, and Slavic; originally spoken by the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe

2. rabbi: a teacher of Jewish law and religion



Although the words “quarrel” and “argue” are often used interchangeably today, they have two decidedly different original meanings. “Quarrel” is from the Latin *queri* (to complain) and *querela* (a complaint). “Argument” is from *arguer* (to prove on the basis of evidence, assert, make known, show, make clear).

Oftentimes disagreements arise that are not terribly serious, but simply matters of taste. Is pepperoni pizza better than mushroom? Are rainy days more pleasant than sunny? Are brown eyes more beautiful than blue? There is no universal answer to any of these questions because there’s no accounting for taste. I like chocolate mint chip ice cream; you like butter pecan. We can try to persuade each other to appreciate a different kind of ice cream, but in the end it’s neither good nor bad to like only one or the other—or to dislike ice cream altogether.

Disagreements of a more serious nature arise when there’s a moral component to the question. That’s because every moral question implies a right or a wrong answer. Not only that, but morality greatly impacts our happiness, as well as the health of our society. It’s not simply a matter of taste when a mother rebukes her defiant daughter for cheating on a test. Or if a father has a problem with his son listening to music with dark or violent lyrics. The mother is concerned about a host of moral

issues. How does her daughter’s cheating hurt the honest students? How has the daughter cheated herself out of her own education, which includes working hard? Will the cheating cause her daughter to make a habit of dishonesty and laziness? This is not a debate about roses and peonies here. Likewise, the father has moral concerns that go beyond whether or not he likes the sound of violent music. If he was raised on surf pop or blues music, the dad may wince at the different sound. But the dad also worries that violent music will deaden his son’s conscience. Will the explicit lyrics coarsen his behavior toward girls? Will the obscenities make him more inclined to taint thoughtful conversations with a sewer stream of four-letter words? Morality is so much more important than taste. It’s all about right or wrong attitudes and behavior. It’s all about reaching for what’s good or sliding in the opposite direction. Because of this, moral matters almost always lead us to sharper disagreements.

You’ve heard it said, “There are two sides to every question,” but for moral issues that is an understatement! Two sides are much too few. It would be better to describe each moral debate as having two opposing extremes with a spectrum of opinions in between. Here’s a short list of some of the topics of hot moral debates that are happening today:

- gun rights
- recreational drugs
- social media
- abortion
- sexual behaviors
- pornography

- human rights
- immigration
- “designer” babies (embryos genetically modified for some desirable trait, such as curly hair or high intelligence)
- climate change
- robots and artificial intelligence

In each of these debates, there are many, many different opinions. Some of the opinions strongly and directly oppose each other, and there are many others that fall someplace in between.

Take a look at one moral issue that at first you might think would be cut and dried: homicide. Most people would agree that killing a human being is a terrible crime. However, it’s not quite that simple. Many people believe that homicide is permitted in self-defense or in certain instances of warfare. On the other hand, a few people believe that the killing of any person is wrong, even if it’s done in self-defense.

Some people even take it farther than that. Not too long ago, I saw graffiti spray-painted on the side of a steak house that said, “Meat is murder!” Some people believe that butchering and eating animals is homicide as well. Now, it’s understandable if someone’s conscience will not allow the eating of meat. But this steak-house vandal wanted to create equivalence between people and animals, as if cows are as valuable as people. If meat is murder, then pity the lion or tiger that must “murder” fellow animals in order to eat. Should big cats become vegans, too?

Some cultures of the world permit and even celebrate murder. The ancient Canaanites sacrificed infants to their deity Moloch and then burned the infants’ remains. In fact, human sacrifice happened with deplorable regularity among almost all the early civilizations of the earth. Throughout history, we see terrorists and criminal rulers praising murder as if it were a virtue. Consider this twisted thinking by Maximilien Robespierre, one of the leaders during the Reign of Terror in France: “Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue.” Thousands of people lost their heads to the guillotine thanks to this rubbish about virtue. Robespierre’s thoughts were mirrored by the terrorist Osama bin Laden when he said, “We say that our terror against America is a blessed terror.” On another occasion he said, “The pieces of the bodies of infidels were flying like dust particles. If you would have seen it with your own eyes, you would have been very pleased, and your heart would have been filled with joy.”

As you can see, there is a spectrum of opinion on the topic of homicide, and you’ll find that’s the case with any moral issue. With so many divergent ideas in the world, and also many extreme, debased ideas, disagreements about moral issues can have great consequences. There’s often a serious reason for our disagreements, and we need to learn to defend the good, the true, and the beautiful.

When moral issues are up for debate, it’s important that wise people take part in the conversation so that we are arguing constructively rather than quarreling destructively. By your “clear line of thinking aimed at proving a point,” you may be able to prevent or subdue some quarrels and pro-

Word Roots!

The word “essay” comes from the Latin *exagium* (a weighing) and is related to the verb *exagere* (to examine, test; literally, to drive out). An essay is an effort or an attempt to weigh, evaluate, examine, and test an idea. It is related to the idea of melting gold until the dross (impurities) floats to the top, so that it can be skimmed off and removed, thus purifying the gold. An essay “purifies” or distills an idea.

more helpful discussion instead—that is, of course, if people are actually willing to listen. Hopefully we want more from our conversations than to hear ourselves blow hot air. Hopefully we want to arrive at a deeper understanding of each other and of the truth. Dr. Ruth Simmons, former president of Brown University, once said, “It is easy enough to exist in a realm where everyone is like-minded and speaks only of unimportant matters. That’s easy. While comfort may be found in silence, truth cannot dwell there.”³ In other words, it is vital that people can freely discuss their differences. That is the only way to arrive at truthful understandings. Your ability to argue well will enable you to consider and understand other viewpoints. It will also help you, when necessary, to dispel bad or unhelpful ideas.

The Thesis Essay—

The thesis essay is intended to do just that—defend your ideas against uninformed, foolish, and dangerous ideas—as well as to help you to take a stand on many everyday issues as well. Every thesis essay begins by answering a speculative question.

- Is it better to live in the city or the country?
- What is the future of atomic energy?
- Which is the most important amendment in the Bill of Rights?
- Is it ethical to eat meat?
- How young is too young for owning a cell phone or smartphone?
- Has peer pressure forced students to all think alike on important issues?
- What can be done to stop binge drinking in college?

A speculative question doesn’t have a definite answer; rather, it can have more than one answer, and these answers are open to opinion, counterarguments, and debate. Keep in mind, however, that some answers will be better than others. Some answers will be thoughtful and well supported; others will be careless and weak. For example, if someone were to ask “What is a helpful way to motivate students to study hard?” one person could answer, “Have high expectations for the student,” which is a thoughtful answer, while another person could say, “Give the student a swift kick in the pants,” which isn’t particularly thoughtful or helpful.

3. Ruth J. Simmons, “Text of the President’s Opening Convocation Address” (speech), Brown University, September 4, 2001, Providence, Rhode Island, transcript, http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/2001-02/01-014t.html.

Recognizing Dichotomies

Notice how the question “Is it better to live in the city or the country?” implies that there are only two possible answers. This implication creates a divide (or dichotomy) between country lovers and city lovers. There are other possible answers: Neither is better, a hybrid lifestyle is better, the suburbs are better, both are equally good. Dichotomies aren’t necessarily bad, but it is important to recognize that some speculative questions—the way they are phrased—can limit the possible answers.

In addition, some speculative questions are not as open-ended as they may seem even if they do not create dichotomies. The question “What can be done to stop binge drinking in college?” assumes that binge drinking is universally injurious. While that is undoubtedly true, the question limits our possible opinions because it assumes from the start that we agree that binge drinking is a problem. Even if they are wrong, some people may say, “Binge drinking should be allowed in college as long as students are monitored by chaperones.” The limitations of the question do not allow for that kind of answer.

It’s sometimes tricky to see that even open-ended questions may restrict how we think about a problem. In some situations, questions that limit possible answers are meant to make our responses focused and well defined. On the other hand, in some situations it may be good to notice that a question is too limiting or creates a dichotomy so that you can rephrase it in your mind in order to consider a wider array of answers.

As you write a thesis essay, your thesis statement will be your thoughtful answer to a speculative question. The question will have many possible answers. For example, here’s a typical open-ended, speculative question: “What is the best form of government?”

Here’s a possible thesis that answers the question: “A republic is the best form of government because it limits the power of both the government and the majority, and keeps them both in balance.”

And here’s a different possibility: “A constitutional monarchy is the best form of government because kings and queens provide unmatched stability and are a force for national unity.”

The thesis essay is a logical investigation of a speculative question. It works to defend the thesis statement. Before you think in detailed terms of the essay’s defensive system, however, take some time to get some more practice with thesis statements and speculative questions.



Tell It Back—Summary

Summarize aloud three or four important ideas in this lesson. Then, in the space provided, write one well-crafted sentence that tells the main idea of the lesson as best as you understand it. To arrive at the main idea, ask yourself, “What is the chief purpose of the lesson?”

Main idea:

Talk About It—

1. Do you enjoy debates and arguments, or are you a person who generally likes to avoid them? Explain your answer.
2. In his play *Magic*, G.K. Chesterton says, “I object to a quarrel because it always interrupts an argument.” How might a quarrel end an argument, and an argument end a quarrel?
3. Is it important to look at questions from different sides? If so, why? And is it possible to be too open-minded? Why would that be a concern?

Write & Discuss—

Too often what begins as a reasonable discussion ends up as a quarrel. At age sixteen, George Washington copied down some ideas for keeping conversations reasonable and polite in his commonplace book. Today, these ideas can be found in a collection called *110 Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*. Read over the following partial list of Washington’s rules and then identify one or two that strike you as the most important. Consider why you think they are important. Would you subtract any rules from this list as not helpful or add any of your own rules? Take fifteen minutes to write down your thoughts in the space provided. After that, share your thoughts with your teacher or with your class.

Rule 1: Every Action done in Company ought to be with Some Sign of Respect to those that are Present.

- Rule 40: Strive not with your Superiors in argument, but always Submit your Judgment to others with Modesty.
- Rule 47: Mock not nor Jest at any thing of Importance; break no Jest that are Sharp Biting⁴ . . .
- Rule 49: Use no Reproachful Language against anyone, neither Curse nor Revile.
- Rule 58: Let your Conversation be without Malice or Envy, for 'tis a Sign of a Tractable and Commendable Nature: And in all Causes of Passion admit Reason to Govern.⁵
- Rule 61: Utter not base and frivolous things amongst grave and Learned Men nor very Difficult Questions or Subjects among the Ignorant or things hard to be believed, and Stuff not your Discourse with Sentences amongst your Betters nor Equals.⁶
- Rule 65: Speak not injurious Words; neither in Jest nor Earnest. Scoff at none although they give Occasion.
- Rule 73: Think before you Speak. Pronounce not imperfectly nor bring out your Words too hastily but orderly & distinctly.
- Rule 74: When Another Speaks be attentive your Self and disturb not the Audience. If any hesitate in his Words help him not nor Prompt him without desired, Interrupt him not, nor Answer him till his Speech be ended.
- Rule 76: While you are talking, Point not with your Finger at him of Whom you Discourse nor Approach too near him to whom you talk especially to his face.⁷

Thoughts and observations:



4. "break no Jest that are Sharp Biting": In other words, don't use sarcasm or harsh humor in conversation.
 5. In modern English this rule would read "By avoiding cruelty or jealousy in your conversations, you will show yourself to be an amenable and praiseworthy person. Make sure that your enthusiasms are guided by reason."
 6. Washington is suggesting that it's rude for a person to say crass or silly things among serious and intelligent people and to utter "lofty ideas" among people who have little understanding. He also urges a person to avoid speaking excessively when in the company of peers.
 7. Adapted from "The Rules of Civility," George Washington's Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, accessed June 28, 2018, <http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/rules-of-civility>.

Go Deeper—

1. A speculative question doesn't have a definite answer; rather, it can have more than one answer, and these answers are open to opinion, counterarguments, and debate. "Is the moon made of Swiss cheese?" This is not a speculative question. The answer is definitively "No!" "What is the taste of serenity?" This is also not a speculative question. There is no answer to such a question. On the other hand, this is a speculative question: "Will people one day colonize Mars?" The answer is still up in the air and can be debated.

Speculative questions can help a writer or speaker form a thesis because the question causes the speaker to think about a topic and develop an opinion. A thesis statement directly answers a speculative question.

- A. Read the following questions and circle those that are speculative and would be helpful in forming a thesis.

Example:

Is it good to be single?

Are hurricanes destructive when they strike land?

What is the meaning of life?

When is a rainbow not a rainbow?

- a. Can monkeys create art?
 - b. What was the color of George Washington's white horse?
 - c. Does the earth revolve around the sun?
 - d. What is the main cause of poverty?
 - e. Are you sleeping?
 - f. What is the formula for the surface area of a pyramid?
 - g. Were history's queens better rulers than history's kings?
 - h. What is love?
 - i. What is the color of the wind?
 - j. Is there life after death?
 - k. How can human trafficking be stopped?
 - l. How many angles are part of a circle?
 - m. To what extent should robots replace human labor?
 - n. Should voters be required to pass a civics test?
 - o. When should students have access to a smartphone?
- B. Now write three speculative questions of your own that could prompt a thesis essay.
Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:



2. A thesis statement is the main idea or argument of an essay, oration, or discussion. In an expository essay, its purpose is to explain. In an analytical essay, its purpose is to analyze and weigh strengths and weaknesses. In a persuasive essay, such as the thesis essays in this book, its purpose is to persuade an audience and provide structure for the rest of the essay. A good persuasive thesis takes a position or expresses an opinion and is open to debate.

Read the following essay excerpts and underline the thesis statement for each one.^A Then in the space provided write a speculative question that might have prompted the author to write about that topic.

^AWhen you search for a thesis, keep in mind that thesis statements are as varied as writers themselves. This is the style of simple thesis statements you will be asked to write in this book:

- Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety. —Ben Franklin

However, when you are asked to identify thesis statements in some of the exercises, you will see that not every statement is found in a single, discreet sentence. Sometimes the thesis can be made in two or three sentences. For example:

- Man is born broken. He lives by mending. —Eugene O'Neill⁸
- Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on preserving some of the past. When change is absolute there is nothing left to improve. . . . Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. —adapted from George Santayana⁹

Or sometimes the thesis statement can be found within a longer sentence, as in the following example:

- Life, liberty, and the pursuit of property were just what Aristotle did not talk about; they are the conditions of happiness, but the essence of happiness, according to Aristotle, is virtue. —Allan Bloom¹⁰

It is good to keep this in mind if you are having difficulty identifying a thesis.

8. Eugene O'Neill, *The Great God Brown*, act 4, scene 1; quoted in Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 112.

9. Adapted from George Santayana, *The Life of Reason; or the Phases of Human Progress* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 172.

10. Allan Bloom, "Commerce and 'Culture,'" in *Giants and Dwarfs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 263.

Example:

Sports are replacing religion for masses of Americans today. If you doubt this is true, consider that the fastest growing religious category in America is “not religious.” While attendance is shrinking at churches and synagogues, more and more time is devoted by families and student athletes to travel leagues and to semiprofessional teams at schools and colleges. Consider that sports fans have their saints—the top athletes of the day—and their holy places—million-dollar stadiums and any room dedicated to game-watching on TV. Sports fans wear their holy garb, their team colors, and they paint their faces and wave their flags like the true believers of any faith. At sports games there are chants and songs and anthem singing that resemble the singing of hymns.

Speculative question:

What is replacing religion for masses of Americans today?

Regarding Writing Tips

- A. Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word “tell.” —from *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr.¹¹

Speculative question:

- B. When a tiny word gives you a big headache, it’s probably a pronoun. Pronouns are usually small (I, me, he, she, it), but they’re among the biggest troublemakers in the language. If you’ve ever been picked on by the pronoun police, don’t despair. You’re in good company. Hundreds of years after the first Ophelia cried, “Woe is me,” only a pedant would argue that Shakespeare should have written “Woe is I” or “Woe is unto me.” . . . The point is that no one is exempt from having his pronouns second-guessed. Put simply, a pronoun is an understudy for a noun. *He* may stand in for “Ralph,” *she* for “Alice,” *they* for “the Kramdens” and *it* for “the stuffed piranha.” —from *Woe Is I* by Patricia T. O’Conner¹²

Speculative question:

11. William Strunk Jr., *The Elements of Style* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1919), xiv.

12. Patricia T. O’Conner, *Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe’s Guide to Better English in Plain English*, 4th ed. (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019), 1. Used by permission of the author.

Regarding Cooking

- C. To me the word “curry” is as degrading to India’s great cuisine as the term “chop suey” was to China’s. But just as Americans have learned, in the last few years, to distinguish between the different styles of Chinese cooking and between the different dishes, I fervently hope that they will do the same with Indian food instead of lumping it all under the dubious catch-all title of curry. “Curry” is just a vague, inaccurate word which the world has picked up from the British who in turn got it mistakenly from us. —from *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* by Madhur Jaffrey¹³

Speculative question:

- D. Louisiana is a terrific setting for a cook because of its bountiful natural resources, including a variety of wildlife and a wealth of fresh seafood that is extraordinary because of the state’s diverse water resources: the brackish waters in the coastal wetlands and in many of the southernmost lakes, the saltwater of the Gulf, and the freshwater lakes and streams throughout the state. Also, our subtropical climate produces a taste in fruits and vegetable that is unmatched—when the taste is there, it’s just really staggering. —from *Chef Paul Prudhomme’s Louisiana Kitchen* by Paul Prudhomme¹⁴

Speculative question:

Regarding the Chinese Revolution and Mao Tse-Tung

- E. A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another. —from *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan* by Mao Tse-Tung¹⁵

Speculative question:

13. Madhur Jaffrey, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 5. Copyright © 1973 by Madhur Jaffrey. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC (US), and by permission of Harold Ober Associate Incorporated (UK). Any third party use of this material, outside of this publication, is prohibited. Interested parties must apply directly to Penguin Random House LLC for permission.
14. Paul Prudhomme, *Chef Paul Prudhomme’s Louisiana Kitchen* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1984), 14.
15. Mao Tse-Tung, *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, March 1927, Marxists.org, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_2.htm.

- F. The Chinese dictator Mao was one of the worst dictators in human history. In terms of numbers murdered, he was worse than Hitler and Stalin combined. Between mass executions of his political enemies, death and labor camps, and terror spree, Mao inspired the murder of some 60 to 70 million people. Of that incomprehensible number, about 45 million died in the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward. In those dark times, between 1958 and 1962, starving farmers were forced to eat rats and mud to fill their bellies.¹⁶ Mao famously said, “It is better to let half of the people die so that the other half can eat their fill.”¹⁷

Speculative question:

Regarding Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism is a form of government headed by a dictator who uses terror and secret police to exert control over his people. Totalitarian governments such as those of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union caused many of the great calamities of the twentieth century and represented a substantial challenge to human rights and freedom.

- G. The totalitarian brand of tyranny has perfected an awesome technique for stripping the individual of all material and spiritual resources which might bolster his independence and self-respect. It deprives him of every alternative and refuge—even that of silence or retreat into solitariness. Not only is he cut off from the outside world, but his fellow men around him—including relatives, friends, and neighbors—are a threat rather than a support. He stands alone and naked, deprived even of the magic of words to sustain him in his total aloneness. For Stalin¹⁸ has murdered all potent words, and drained the lifeblood out of “honor,” “truth,” “justice,” “liberty,” “equality,” “brotherhood,” “humanity.”¹⁹ —from *The Ordeal of Change* by Eric Hoffer²⁰

Speculative question:

16. Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), n.p.

17. As quoted in Frank Dikötter, “Mao’s Great Leap to Famine,” *New York Times*, December 15, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/16/opinion/16iht-eddikotter16.html>.

18. Stalin: dictator of the Soviet Union from the late 1920s until his death in 1953

19. This passage is saying that a totalitarian government strips away all of our freedom as individuals, and it even takes away the words and ideas that would give us hope. The dictator Stalin was particularly skillful at killing the historical meaning of words and twisting them to mean something entirely different. For example, he might say that “honor” was spying on a neighbor and reporting him to the police. He might say that “justice” was murdering his enemies because they disagreed with him. By changing the meanings of words in this way, he took away the power and the hope that might be found in those words.

20. Eric Hoffer, *The Ordeal of Change* (Titusville, NJ: Hopewell Publications, 2006), n.p. Reprinted with permission from Hopewell Publications, LLC.

President Ronald Reagan was a foe of totalitarian dictatorships. In 1982, he addressed the British government, known as Parliament, with the goal of reawakening its confidence in “individual liberty, representative government, and the rule of law under God.” He wanted Britain to work with the United States in stopping the spread of totalitarianism in the world. (Please note that although this passage contains several paragraphs, it answers a single speculative question and contains one overall thesis.)

H. We’re approaching the end of a bloody century plagued by a terrible political invention—totalitarianism. Optimism comes less easily today, not because democracy is less vigorous, but because democracy’s enemies have refined their instruments of repression. Yet optimism is in order, because day by day democracy is proving itself to be a not-at-all-fragile flower. . . .

[In El Salvador the] silent, suffering people were offered a chance to vote, to choose the kind of government they wanted. Suddenly the freedom-fighters in the hills were exposed for what they really are—Cuban-backed guerrillas²¹ who want power for themselves, and their backers, not democracy for the people. They threatened death to any who voted, and destroyed hundreds of buses and trucks to keep the people from getting to the polling places. But on election day, the people of El Salvador, an unprecedented 1.4 million of them, braved ambush and gunfire, and trudged for miles to vote for freedom.

They stood for hours in the hot sun waiting for their turn to vote. Members of our Congress who went there as observers told me of a woman who was wounded by rifle fire on the way to the polls, who refused to leave the line to have her wound treated until after she had voted. A grandmother, who had been told by the guerrillas she would be killed when she returned from the polls, and she told the guerrillas, “You can kill me, you can kill my family, kill my neighbors, but you can’t kill us all.” The real freedom-fighters of El Salvador turned out to be the people of that country—the young, the old, the in-between. . . .

No, democracy is not a fragile flower. Still it needs cultivating. If the rest of this century is to witness the gradual growth of freedom and democratic ideals, we must take actions to assist the campaign for democracy. —from “Address to Members of the British Parliament” by Ronald Reagan, delivered June 8, 1982²²

Speculative question:

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21. During the Salvadoran Civil War (1979–1992), guerillas who were supported by communist Cuba and who claimed to be “freedom fighters” opposed the military-run Salvadoran government. When the government gave civilians the chance to vote, the guerillas threatened the civilians with murder if they participated in the voting. In the end, both the government and the guerillas proved guilty of many atrocities.
22. Ronald Reagan, “Address to Members of the British Parliament” (speech), Palace of Westminster, June 8, 1982, London, England, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, transcript, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/60882a>.

Regarding Technology Compulsion

Technology compulsion is the inability of a person to resist using a digital device, such as a cell phone or video game console, or a social media platform or other app. Compulsive behaviors take a negative toll on the health and happiness of many people. Other compulsions include gambling and shopping, and are often termed addictions. “Compulsion” is the more accurate psychological term.

- I. It should come as no surprise that we are all hopelessly addicted to our devices, particularly our smartphones. Why shouldn’t we be? We are now able to carry a powerful computer around 24/7 in our pocket or purse. The new “WWW” really means “Whatever, Wherever, Whenever.” And we are all succumbing to its draw. Just look at any restaurant table and you will see phones sitting next to forks and knives. It is normal to see someone pick up a smartphone, tap tap tap and put it back down while in the middle of talking. Is this healthy or are we all headed down a slippery slope toward what I call an “iDisorder”? An iDisorder is where you exhibit signs and symptoms of a psychiatric disorder such as OCD, narcissism, addiction or even ADHD, which are manifested through your use—or overuse—of technology. Whether our use of technology makes us exhibit these signs or simply exacerbates our natural tendencies is an open question. —from an article by Larry D. Rosen, author of *iDisorder*²³

Speculative question:

- J. One of the ironies of iGen life is that despite spending far more time under the same roof as their parents, today’s teens can hardly be said to be closer to their mothers and fathers than their predecessors were. “I’ve seen my friends with their families—they don’t talk to them,” Athena told me. “They just say ‘Okay, okay, whatever’ while they’re on their phones. They don’t pay attention to their family.” Like her peers, Athena is an expert at tuning out her parents so she can focus on her phone. She spent much of her summer keeping up with friends, but nearly all of it was over text or Snapchat. “I’ve been on my phone more than I’ve been with actual people,” she said. “My bed has, like, an imprint of my body.”

In this, too, she is typical. The number of teens who get together with their friends nearly every day dropped by more than 40 percent from 2000 to 2015; the decline has been especially steep recently. It’s not only a matter of fewer kids partying; fewer kids are spending time simply hanging out. That’s something most teens used to do:

23. Larry D. Rosen, “Face the Facts: We Are All Headed for an iDisorder,” *Lifehack*, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifehack/face-the-facts-we-are-all-headed-for-an-idisorder.html>. Used by permission of the author.

nerds and jocks, poor kids and rich kids, C students and A students. The roller rink, the basketball court, the town pool, the local necking spot—they’ve all been replaced by virtual spaces accessed through apps and the web.

You might expect that teens spend so much time in these new spaces because it makes them happy, but most data suggest that it does not. . . . The results could not be clearer: Teens who spend more time than average on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more time than average on nonscreen activities are more likely to be happy. —from “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” by Jean M. Twenge²⁴

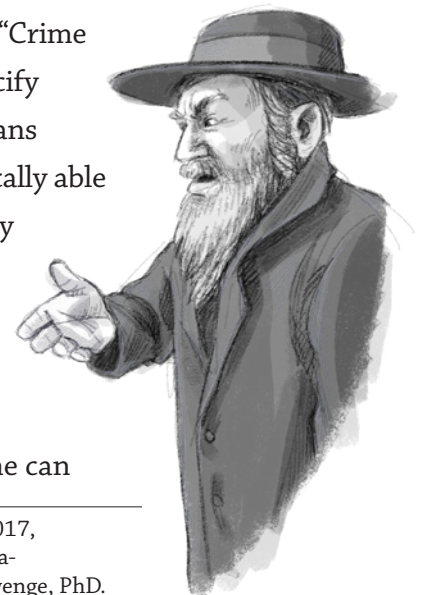
Speculative question:

-
3. **WRITING THESIS STATEMENTS**—Guns. Should Americans be permitted to own and carry guns? If so, what kind of guns and how much ammunition? Does the US Constitution protect the right of private citizens to own guns, or does it restrict gun ownership to policemen, the military, and trained militias? There are many, many sides to this complex moral issue.

In this exercise you will read two excerpts with two different perspectives on the topic. At the end of each excerpt, follow the instructions to get some practice with thesis statements. Please note that you do not have to agree with the statements you create in completing this exercise. This is a contentious issue, and you are not expected to agree with one side or the other.

Remember that a persuasive thesis statement

- is clear and specific and avoids being too broad. For example, “Crime does not pay” is too broad a thesis statement. It does not specify what type of crime (among a myriad of crimes) or what it means by “pay.” A more specific thesis statement would be “All medically able prison inmates should be required to pay restitution to society by working jobs during their imprisonment.”
- takes a position and expresses an opinion that others can argue or dispute. It is not an obvious fact or observation. For example, “Butterflies belong to the insect order of Lepidoptera” is both an obvious fact and observation. No one can



24. Jean M. Twenge, “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?”, *The Atlantic*, September 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/>; from *iGen* by Jean M. Twenge, PhD. Copyright © 2017 by Jean M. Twenge, PhD. Reprinted with the permission of Atria Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc. All rights reserved.

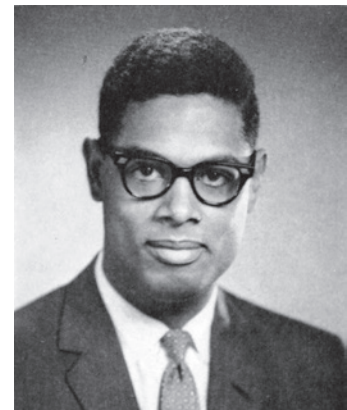
argue that butterflies are not Lepidoptera. A better, more debatable thesis would be: “Butterflies are the main reason to visit the cloud forests of Costa Rica.”

- is not a question, but is written in response to a speculative question. For example, this is not a thesis statement: “Should walnut growers be permitted to label their products as a medicine for the heart?” When turned into a statement, however, this question becomes a proper thesis: “Walnut growers should be permitted to label their products as a medicine for the heart.”
- can be supported with evidence. The thesis about walnuts in the previous point can be supported, as there are many studies that show that walnuts provide nutrients for proper heart function and can lower “bad cholesterol” in the blood. On the other hand, the statement “Pie makers should be permitted to label sugar cream pies as a medicine for the heart” is insupportable, as there is no evidence to back up this claim.

A. **“Gun-Control Ignorance” by Thomas Sowell**

How many times do the same arguments need to be refuted?

Must every tragic mass shooting bring out the shrill ignorance of “gun control” advocates? The key fallacy of so-called gun-control laws is that such laws do not in fact control guns. They simply disarm law-abiding citizens, while people bent on violence find firearms readily available. If gun-control zealots²⁵ had any respect for facts, they would have discovered this long ago, because there have been too many factual studies over the years to leave any serious doubt about gun-control laws being not merely futile but counterproductive.



▲ Thomas Sowell

Places and times with the strongest gun-control laws have often been places and times with high murder rates. Washington, D.C., is a classic example, but just one among many. The rate of gun ownership is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, but the murder rate is higher in urban areas. . . . For the country as a whole, handgun ownership doubled in the late 20th century, while the murder rate went down.

The few counter-examples offered by gun-control zealots do not stand up under scrutiny. Perhaps their strongest talking point is that Britain has stronger gun-control laws than the United States and lower murder rates. But, if you look back through history, you will find that Britain has had a lower murder rate than the United States for more than two centuries—and, for most of that time, the British had no more stringent gun-control laws than the United States. Indeed, neither country had stringent gun control for most of that time. . . .

25. zealots: people who show passion or fanaticism for a cause

* Neither guns nor gun control were the reason for the difference in murder rates. People were the difference. Yet many of the most zealous advocates of gun-control laws on both sides of the Atlantic have also been advocates of leniency toward criminals. In Britain, such people have been so successful that legal gun ownership has been reduced almost to the vanishing point, while even most convicted felons are not put behind bars. The crime rate, including the rate of crimes committed with guns, is far higher in Britain now than it was back in the days when there were few restrictions on Britons buying firearms. In 1954, there were only a dozen armed robberies in London but, by the 1990s—after decades of ever tightening gun-ownership restrictions—there were more than a hundred times as many armed robberies.



Gun-control zealots' choice of Britain for comparison with the United States has been wholly tendentious,²⁶ not only because it ignored the history of the two countries, but also because it ignored other countries with stronger gun-control laws than the United States, such as Russia, Brazil, and Mexico. All of these countries have higher murder rates than the United States. You could compare other sets of countries and get similar results. Gun ownership has been three times as high in Switzerland as in Germany, but the Swiss have had lower murder rates. Other countries with high rates of gun ownership and low murder rates include Israel, New Zealand, and Finland.

Guns are not the problem. People are the problem—including people who are determined to push gun-control laws, either in ignorance of the facts or in defiance of the facts. There is innocent ignorance and there is invincible, dogmatic,²⁷ and self-righteous ignorance. Every tragic mass shooting seems to bring out examples of both among gun-control advocates.²⁸

- a. Identify and underline the thesis statement for the entire excerpt. The thesis may be one or two sentences long.

26. tendentious: tainted by bias and prejudice

27. dogmatic: stubborn [in asserting an opinion]

28. Adapted from Thomas Sowell, "Gun-Control Ignorance," *National Review*, December 18, 2012, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/335848/gun-control-ignorance-thomas-sowell>. Used by permission of Thomas Sowell and Creators Syndicate, Inc.



- b. Next, paraphrase the thesis statement you underlined—in other words, put the author’s main idea into different words—or create a new statement based on your understanding of the excerpt. Write your “new” thesis statement in the space provided. New thesis statement:

- c. One paragraph in the excerpt is marked with an asterisk in the margin. In this paragraph the author implies that there is a cause of gun violence and crime that has nothing to do with gun ownership. If this paragraph were expanded to make an entire speech, what would the thesis statement of the speech be? In other words, what is the paragraph’s main idea, and how would you phrase that main idea as a thesis statement for an entire speech? Write your thesis in the space provided. Thesis statement for a speech based on the marked paragraph:

B. **“Remarks by the President on Common-Sense Gun Safety Reform”
by Barack Obama**

Every single year, more than 30,000 Americans have their lives cut short by guns—30,000.²⁹ Suicides. Domestic violence. Gang shootouts. Accidents. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have lost brothers and sisters, or buried their own children. Many have had to learn to live with a disability, or learned to live without the love of their life. . . .

The United States of America is not the only country on Earth with violent or dangerous people. We are not inherently more prone to violence. But we are the only advanced country on Earth that sees this kind of mass violence erupt with this kind of frequency. It doesn’t happen in other advanced countries. It’s not even close. And as I’ve said before, somehow we’ve become numb to it and we start thinking that this is normal.

And instead of thinking about how to solve the problem, this has become one of our most polarized, partisan³⁰ debates—despite the fact that there’s a general consensus³¹ in America about what needs to be done. . . .

I’m not on the ballot again. I’m not looking to score some points. I think we can disagree without impugning³² other people’s motives or without being disagreeable. We don’t need to be talking past one another. But we do have to feel a sense of urgency about it. In Dr. King’s words, we need to feel the “fierce urgency of now.” Because people are dying. And the constant excuses for inaction no longer do, no longer suffice.

That’s why we’re here today. Not to debate the last mass shooting, but to do something to try to prevent the next one. To prove that the vast majority of Americans, even if our voices aren’t always the loudest or most extreme, care enough about a little boy like Daniel³³ to come together and take common-sense steps to save lives and protect more of our children.



▲ Official photographic portrait of US President Barack Obama, January 13, 2009. Image courtesy of The Obama-Biden Transition Project, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Official_portrait_of_Barack_Obama.jpg.

29. The author of *Thesis Part 1* notes that two-thirds of the deaths in this statistic are suicides. (Drew Desilver, “Suicides Account for Most Gun Deaths,” May 24, 2013, Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/05/24/suicides-account-for-most-gun-deaths/>.)

30. partisan: one-sided; adhering to the position of one political party

31. consensus: agreement

32. impugning: opposing or attacking

33. This is a reference to Daniel Barden, a seven-year-old victim of the Sandy Hook school shooting on December 14, 2012.

Now, I want to be absolutely clear at the start—and I’ve said this over and over again . . . I believe in the Second Amendment.³⁴ It’s there written on the paper. It guarantees a right to bear arms. No matter how many times people try to twist my words around—I taught constitutional law, I know a little about this—I get it. But I also believe that we can find ways to reduce gun violence consistent with the Second Amendment.

I mean, think about it. We all believe in the First Amendment, the guarantee of free speech, but we accept that you can’t yell “fire” in a theater. We understand there are some constraints on our freedom in order to protect innocent people. We cherish our right to privacy, but we accept that you have to go through metal detectors before being allowed to board a plane. It’s not because people like doing that, but we understand that that’s part of the price of living in a civilized society.

And what’s often ignored in this debate is that a majority of gun owners actually agree. A majority of gun owners agree that we can respect the Second Amendment while keeping an irresponsible, law-breaking feud from inflicting harm on a massive scale.

* Today, background checks are required at gun stores. If a father wants to teach his daughter how to hunt, he can walk into a gun store, get a background check, purchase his weapon safely and responsibly. This is not seen as an infringement on the Second Amendment. Contrary to the claims of what some gun rights proponents have suggested, this hasn’t been the first step in some slippery slope to mass confiscation. Contrary to claims of some presidential candidates, apparently, before this meeting, this is not a plot to take away everybody’s guns. You pass a background check; you purchase a firearm. The problem is some gun sellers have been operating under a different set of rules. A violent felon³⁵ can buy the exact same weapon over the Internet with no background check, no questions asked. A recent study found that about one in 30 people looking to buy guns on one website had criminal records—one out of 30 had a criminal record. We’re talking about individuals convicted of serious crimes—aggravated assault, domestic violence, robbery, illegal gun possession. People with lengthy criminal histories buying deadly weapons all too easily. And this was just one website within the span of a few months.

34. The Second Amendment is often known as “the right to bear arms.” It states, “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

35. felon: a criminal who commits a major crime



• So we've created a system in which dangerous people are allowed to play by a
• different set of rules than a responsible gun owner who buys his or her gun the right
• way and subjects themselves to a background check. That doesn't make sense. Every-
• body should have to abide by the same rules. Most Americans and gun owners agree.
• And that's what we tried to change three years ago, after 26 Americans—including
• 20 children—were murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary. . . .

• How did we get here? How did we get to the place where people think requiring a
• comprehensive background check means taking away people's guns?

• Each time this comes up, we are fed the excuse that common-sense reforms like
• background checks might not have stopped the last massacre, or the one before that,
• or the one before that, so why bother trying. I reject that thinking. We know we can't
• stop every act of violence, every act of evil in the world. But maybe we could try to stop
• one act of evil, one act of violence.

• All of us should be able to work together to find a balance that declares the rest of
• our rights are also important—Second Amendment rights are important, but there
• are other rights that we care about as well. And we have to be able to balance them.
• Because our right to worship freely and safely—that right was denied to Christians in
• Charleston, South Carolina. And that was denied Jews in Kansas City. And that was
• denied Muslims in Chapel Hill, and Sikhs in Oak Creek. They had rights, too.

• Our right to peaceful assembly—that right was robbed from moviegoers in Aurora
• and Lafayette. Our unalienable right to life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—
• those rights were stripped from college students in Blacksburg and Santa Barbara, and
• from high schoolers at Columbine, and from first-graders in Newtown. First-graders.
• And from every family who never imagined that their loved one would be taken from
• our lives by a bullet from a gun.

• Every time I think about those kids it gets me mad. And by the way, it happens on
• the streets of Chicago every day.

• So all of us need to demand a Congress brave enough to stand up to the gun lobby's
• lies. All of us need to stand up and protect its citizens. All of us need to demand gover-
• nors and legislatures and businesses do their part to make our communities safer. We
• need the wide majority of responsible gun owners who grieve with us every time this
• happens and feel like your views are not being properly represented to join with us to
• demand something better.³⁶

36. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on Common-Sense Gun Safety Reform" (speech), The White House, January 5, 2016, Washington, DC, transcript, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/01/05/remarks-president-common-sense-gun-safety-reform>.

- a. Identify and underline the thesis statement for the entire excerpt. Please note that the thesis may not appear in the first paragraph of the excerpt.
- b. Next, paraphrase the thesis statement you underlined—in other words, put the author’s main idea into different words—or create a new statement based on your understanding of the speech. Write your “new” thesis statement in the space provided. New thesis statement:

- c. One paragraph in the excerpt is marked with an asterisk in the margin. In this paragraph the former president implies that supporters of gun rights have a mistaken idea. If this paragraph were expanded to make an entire speech, what would the thesis statement of the speech be? In other words, what is the paragraph’s main idea, and how would you phrase that main idea as a thesis statement for an entire speech? Write your thesis statement in the space provided.

Thesis statement for a speech based on the marked paragraph:
