



How to Write A Literary Essay

Tips, tricks, & tutorials for thematic analysis



Thematic Analysis

- ❖ **WHAT** big ideas and thematic concepts is this text about?
- ❖ **HOW** did the author use particular characters, plot points, narrative devices, etc. to create the theme?
- ❖ **WHY** did the author write the text? What message do they hope to convey about the human experience?

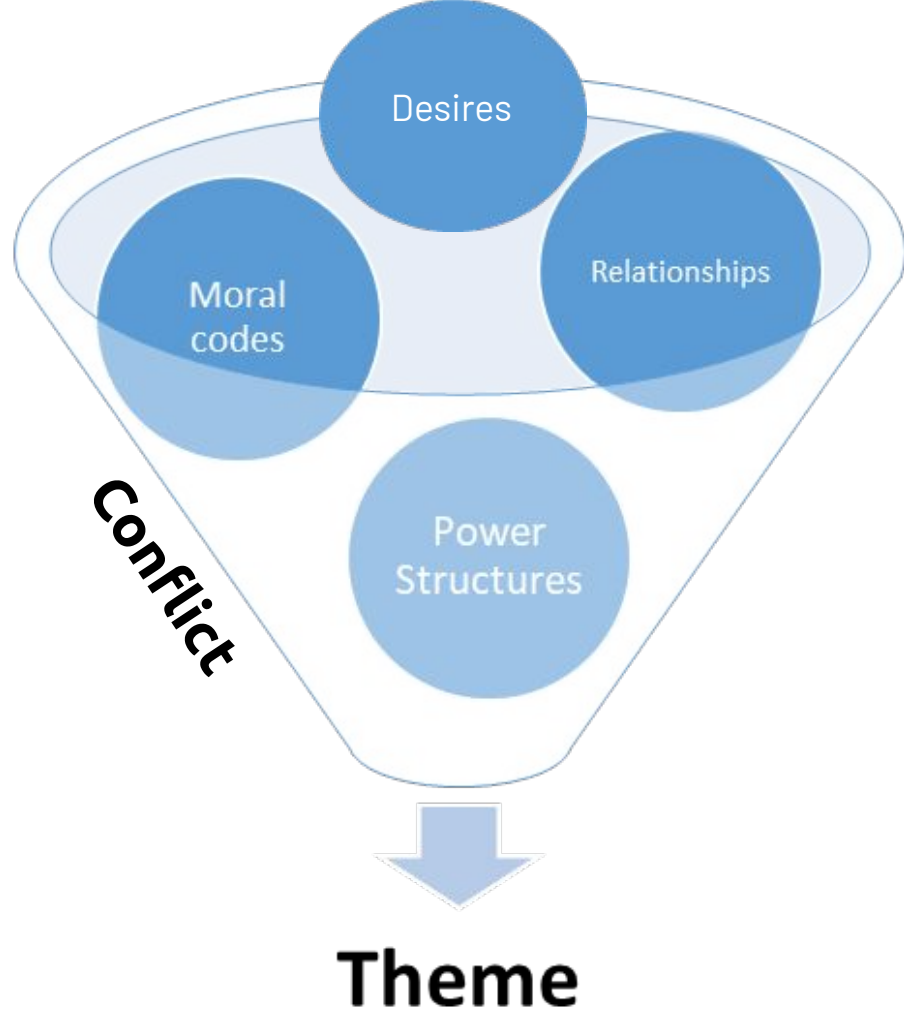
E.g. The film *Shrek* **challenges our assumptions** about how heroes must look and act by casting an ogre as the protagonist. Through *Shrek's* **bravery, fortitude, and self-sacrifice**, the author reveals that **true heroism** comes from within.



Thematic Analysis

- ❖ View the video on **thematic analysis**
- ❖ Create a quick sketchnote in your notebook





Social Complexity

Most conflict in stories is caused by competing **desires, relationships, power structures, and/or moral codes.**

I. Writing Introductory Paragraphs

The background of the slide is a dense, overlapping collage of numerous white pages of text, resembling a wall covered in papers or a desk with many documents scattered across it. The text on the papers is mostly illegible due to the low resolution and overlapping nature of the images.

Preparing to open your essay and craft your thesis

Understanding Our Terms

1

Thematic Concepts

Individual concepts or "big ideas" that live in all texts.

2

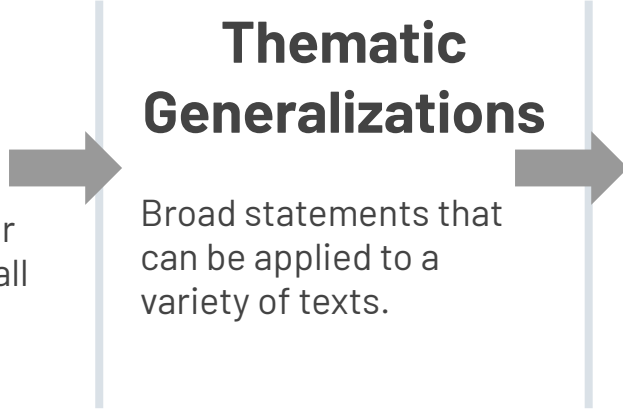
Thematic Generalizations

Broad statements that can be applied to a variety of texts.

3

Literary Thesis

Claims that assert what themes are explored in a specific text.



Thematic Concepts

Big ideas and patterns that structure the human experience



**Appearance,
heroism, bravery,
fortitude**

**The individual,
collective action,
oppressive systems.**

**Prejudice, empathy,
injustice.**



Beauty is in the eye
of the beholder

Plot, setting,
characters

Characterization,
symbolism,
figurative language

Thematic Generalizations

Concept + Concept = Generalization



Regardless of one's **appearance** true **heroism** is defined by **bravery** and **fortitude** not looks.

Individual and **collective action** are both needed to dismantle **oppressive systems**.

Prejudice can diminish our **empathy** and blind us to **injustice**.



Love is a powerful theme.

Bravery and **courage** impact **fear**

Never judge a book by its cover, because people should be given a chance to prove themselves first.

Literary Thesis

Important Aspect of the Text + Thematic Generalization = Literary Thesis



Despite his **appearance** and occasionally crude behavior, Shrek's **bravery** and **fortitude** challenge our **assumptions** about heroes, **suggesting** that true **heroism** comes from within.

The eventual fall of The Capitol in Suzanne Collin's *Hunger Games* **demonstrates** the **power** of **individuals** and **collective action** in dismantling **oppressive systems**.

Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* **reveals** the variety of ways our **prejudice** can diminish our **empathy** and blind us to **injustice** by causing to forget the moral principles that we claim to live by.



Harry Potter is a story about the power of **love** and **sacrifice**.

The main themes in the Lord of the Rings are **bravery**, **courage**, **hope**, and **power**. J.R.R Tolkien tells a story that communicates these themes to the reader so they have a deeper understanding of his message about them.

Black Panther learns many lessons about **power** on his **journey** towards **kingship** that change him a variety of ways.

Literary Thesis

(Review)

Important aspect of the text...

reveals/demonstrates/showcases...

...a broader truth about the human experience.

Then add two pieces of evidence from the text to defend your interpretation



Despite his **appearance** and occasionally crude behavior, Shrek's **bravery** and **fortitude** challenge our **assumptions** about heroes, suggesting true **heroism** comes from within.

The eventual fall of The Capitol at the hands of Katniss Everdeen and the districts **demonstrate** the **power** of **individuals** and **collective action** to dismantle **oppressive systems**.

The racist, hypocritical behavior of Maycomb's residents **reveal** the variety of ways **prejudice** can diminish **empathy** and blind people to **injustice**; leading them to behave in ways that contradict their stated values.

Literary Thesis

(Revise)

- Does your theme statement reference thematic concepts that are relevant to the text's overall message?
- Is your reference to the text too specific or too broad?
- Is your thematic statement too generic?



Literary Thesis

(Sentence Stems for Support)

Five formats to consider using in your thesis...

1. (Insert character's experiences) **leads to** (Insert character growth here), **which reflects** (insert universal experience).
2. **As a result of** (Insert character's experiences) **he/she ultimately** (insert result of character's actions here) **which showcases** (universal human experience tied to character's actions).
3. (Author's name) **conveys** (insert author's message about thematic concept) **though his/her use of** (insert figurative language devices used by author).
4. **The** (insert symbol here) **operates as a symbol for** (insert what symbol stands for here), **which demonstrates** (insert universal experience or truth demonstrated by symbol).
5. (Insert author's name) **explores** (insert universal human experience here) **through** (insert moments of major conflict or crisis experienced by focal character), **suggesting** (insert author's message or opinion about thematic concept here).

Thesis Tutorial

Examples

What

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Boo Radley's act of heroism

highlights the difference between true courage and

and society's perception of an individual.

How

So What?

What

Kurtz's painting in

company's callousness,

proving that power breeds delusion and blinds oppressors to their misdeeds!

So What?

How to Write an Advanced Literary Thesis Statement



Introduction Mentor Texts

What's the relationship between a **hook**, **context**, and **central claim** when introducing a **thematic analysis**?

"We burn a hot fire here;" states Deputy-Governor Danforth in Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, "it melts down all concealment" (55). Miller's title, which means a container where metals are purified by being subjected to an intense heat, becomes an apt metaphor for the ordeal which his characters must undergo. Under such searing illumination Miller's characters either attempt self-preservation by adding heat to the fire, succumb and melt from such heat, or are refined in the process and discover their own true mettle.

Accusations were based on ancient Greek conceptions of "hysteria" and the medieval belief that as the inheritors of Eve's "original sin" women were inherently sensual, sinister, carnal, and prone to evil—especially those women who transgressed socially constructed gender boundaries. Women who wielded any sort of power, such as healers who possessed knowledge about sexuality and its implications (pregnancy, childbirth, and infant mortality), were particularly susceptible to accusations of devil worshipping and witchcraft. Although Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953) rose to fame due to its allegorical critique of the anti-Communist hysteria surrounding McCarthyism, this drama is just as important for what it suggests concerning the power of women's bodies: specifically, that the persecution of witches in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692 was directly linked to the persecution of female sexuality.

Hook

Context

Thematic Claim

Introduction Anchor Chart

What's the relationship between a **hook**, **context**, and **central claim** when introducing an argument?



Hook

Key Attributes

- Be thematically tied to the text
- Is emotionally or intellectually engaging
- Considers history/context/other thematically relevant ideas
- Sets up rest of the paragraph

Craft Moves

- Relevant quote from the text
- *Relevant* historical connection
- Connecting themes

Reflective Questions

- Is my hook a cliché?
- Is my hook emotionally or intellectually engaging?
- Does my hook touch on themes I'll be exploring?



Context

Key Attributes

- Provide brief overview of the text
- Include author and title of text
- Serves as a bridge between the hook and the thematic claim

Craft Moves

- Mention author
- Mention title of text

Reflective Questions

- Do I include author and title?
- Do I transition from my hook to my thesis?
- Do I provide enough background for my reader to understand my thesis?



Central Claim

Key Attributes

- Focused on the point you are trying to prove
- Link between the text and the deeper message/meaning/theme
- Typically one-two sentences
- Opinion based

Craft Moves

- See Tutorial on previous slides

Reflective Questions

- Does your theme statement reference thematic concepts that are relevant to the text's overall message?
- Is your reference to the text too specific or too broad?
- Is your thematic statement too generic?

Introduction Infographic

Engage your readers emotions and introduce your theme

What is a compelling way to introduce the thematic concepts you'll be discussing? How can you frame them in a way that's interesting for your reader?

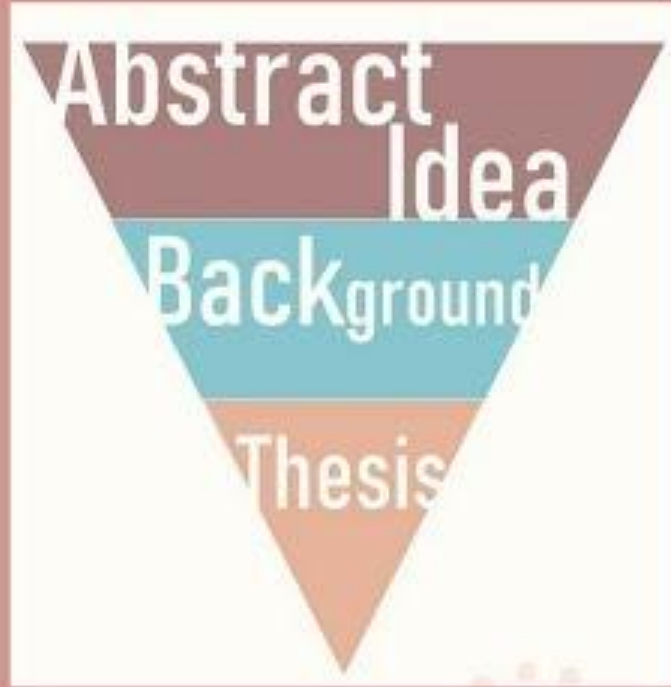
Provide some context about the story. Don't summarize the whole plot, but provide a preview

Include author and title. What does the reader need to know about the text to understand your thematic claim? How can you summarize the text in a way that includes the relevant plot information for your thematic claim?

State your thematic claim

This is the last sentence in the introductory paragraph in academic essays

Introduction Tutorial



Write an
Introduction
for a

LITERARY
ANALYSIS
ESSAY

II. Writing Body Paragraphs

The background of the slide is a dense, overlapping collage of numerous white pages of text, resembling a wall of papers or a desk covered in documents. The text on the pages is mostly illegible due to the low resolution and overlapping nature of the images.

Using claims, evidence, and reasoning to construct your interpretation

Body Paragraph Mentor Texts

How do **claims**, **evidence**, and **reasoning** impact an argument?

The seductive nature of power is very evident in *The Crucible* in both Judge Danforth and Rev. Hale. Their ultimate response to that seduction, however, is quite different. Danforth can certainly be argued as being possessed with theocratic madness which blinds him to any higher purpose, such as justice. The idea of mercy or grace seems rather foreign to a man who introduces his authority by stating “. . . that near to four hundred are in the jails from Marblehead to Lynn, and upon my signature. . . . And seventy-two condemned to hang by that signature” (54). To him, the letter of the law is, indeed, carved in stone and it is enough that “God damns all liars” (63). A recurring criticism of Miller’s portrayal of Danforth is that he is written as “— implacable, ruthless, and unforgiving—[it] would have been more interesting if Mr. Miller had less of a clear-cut villain in mind” (Rothstein C13). Danforth never wavers from his belief in his position of power and ultimate authority over these people. His parting words certainly ring truer to an eleventh commandment spouted from on high than it does a new beatitude from a benevolent savior: “Hang them high over the town. Whoever weeps for these, weeps for corruption” (90-91).

Claim

Evidence

Reasoning

Body Paragraph Anchor Chart

How do **claims**, **evidence**, and **reasoning** impact an argument?



Claims

Key Attributes

- Debatable statement
- Succinct and to the point
- Balance of *sophisticated/clear* language
- Previews ideas from the rest of the paragraph

Craft Moves

- [Click here](#) for list of sentence stems, frames, and starters
- [Click here](#) for a video tutorial

Reflective Questions

- Is my claim a debatable position?
- Is my claim assertive and concise?
- Is my language clear enough that my reader could easily summarize my position?
- Does my claim avoid summarizing and focus on taking a position?



Evidence

Key Attributes

- Clearly supports the claim at the beginning of the paragraph
- Relevant to the central claim
- Seamlessly integrated into the paragraph
- Has enough context for the reader to see the connections

Craft Moves

- [Click here](#) for a list of sentence stems, frames, and starters
- [Click here](#) for a video tutorial

Reflective Questions

- Does my evidence clearly support my claim?
- Do I give enough context before I include my evidence?
- What am I trying to prove with this evidence?
- Do I reference the page number?



Reasoning

Key Attributes

- Further explanation of how the evidence supports the claim
- Provides more commentary and analysis to support the claim
- Makes connections between the evidence and claim clear

Craft Moves

- [Click here](#) for a list of sentence stems, frames, and starters
- [Click here](#) for a video tutorial

Reflective Questions

- Is there a clear link between my evidence and reasoning?
- Does my reasoning help prove the claim I made at the beginning of my paragraph?
- Do I provide enough reasoning for my reader to understand my interpretation?

Writing Analytical Paragraphs

Powerful tips, tricks, and sentence stems to get you started

Parts of Paragraph

Claims

- ↳ Debatable statement
- ↳ Succinct and to the point
- ↳ Balance of *sophisticated/clear* language
- ↳ Previews ideas from the rest of the paragraph

Evidence

- ↳ Clearly supports the claim at the beginning of the paragraph
- ↳ Relevant to the central claim
- ↳ Seamlessly integrated into the paragraph
- ↳ Has enough context for the reader to see the connections

Reasoning

- ↳ Further explanation of how the evidence supports the claim
- ↳ Provides more commentary and analysis to support the claim
- ↳ Makes connections between the evidence and claim clear

Integrating Evidence

The Colon Quote

- In this situation, what precedes and follows the colon must be a complete sentence
 - ↳ **E.g.** Fitzgerald gives Nick a muted tribute to the hero: "Gatsby turned out alright at the end" (2).

The Speaker Quote

- Indicate who is speaking. (So and so says or some other verb)
 - ↳ **E.g.** When Claudius finally addresses Hamlet as his son, Hamlet notes, "..."

The Ellipses Quote

- Ellipses (...) can also be used to reduce a long quotation so that the most important parts are emphasized.
 - ↳ **E.g.**

The Weave Quote

- This is similar to the use of ellipses, but it is usually employed when a quotation would contain several ellipses and/or only a few scattered words from a passage would need to be emphasized.
 - ↳ **E.g.** Hamlet justifies his determination to corroborate the Ghost's charge by noting that the Ghost may in fact be "a devil" exploiting Hamlet's "weakness" and "melancholy".

Key Words

Analytical Verbs

- | | | |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| ↳ Creates | ↳ Portrays | ↳ Reveals |
| ↳ Evokes | ↳ Highlights | ↳ Insinuates |
| ↳ Illustrates | ↳ Establishes | ↳ Explores |
| ↳ Implies | ↳ Presents | ↳ Develops |
| ↳ Conveys | ↳ Suggests | |

Transition Verbs

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| ↳ Reinforced | ↳ Heightened | ↳ Alludes to |
| ↳ Cemented | ↳ Accentuated | ↳ Echoes |
| ↳ Augmented | ↳ Crystallized | ↳ Mirrors |
| ↳ Reflected | ↳ Underlined | |
| ↳ Intensified | ↳ Compounded | |

Connective Verbs

- | | | |
|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| ↳ Therefore | ↳ Notably | ↳ Contrastingly |
| ↳ Equally | ↳ Whereas | ↳ However |
| ↳ Similarly | ↳ Consequently | ↳ Consequently |
| ↳ Crucially | ↳ Despite this | |
| ↳ Moreover | ↳ Furthermore | |

The Quotation Sandwich

Many writers find it useful to think of quotations and other kinds of textual evidence as a metaphorical sandwich in which the quotation is the meat or filling and the text introducing and interpreting the quotation is the bread.



The Quotation Sandwich

Let's discuss each of these steps in detail.

1. Present the argument	State the main argument that the quotation will support, usually a surface/depth argument about the text.
2. Introduce the quotation	Explain where in the text the quotation occurs (who is speaking or what is happening at this point in the text, not the page or line number since this will be given in the citation). Often writers use transitions, such as <i>for instance</i> or <i>for example</i> , to clearly signal that the quotation will support the main argument.
3. Quote	Include only as much text as is needed to support your argument, then document the page or line numbers.
4. Interpret the quotation	Explain why you find the quotation significant, specifying key words or phrases that support your argument. Often the interpretation will begin with a phrase such as <i>This description shows</i> or <i>This passage emphasizes</i> . Key words from the main argument are often used in this interpretation to show relevance and build coherence.

Let's examine how the Paragraph 2 on [page 290](#) follows the quotation sandwich:

III. Writing Conclusions

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Wrapping up your essay with style

Conclusions Mentor Texts

Conclusion Anchor Chart



Conclusion

Key Attributes

- Ties all the previous claims together and provides a recap
- Strikes a balance between reviewing facts and creating emotion
- Creates a sense of closure for the reader by tying previous ideas together instead of introducing new ones.
- Smoothly and naturally recaps previous claims
- Has a strong transition from the previous paragraph

Craft Moves

- [Click here](#) for a list of sentence stems, frames, and starters
- [Click here](#) for a video tutorial

Reflective Questions

- Does my conclusion transition from the previous paragraph?
- Do I restate my claims in an interesting and dynamic way?
- Do I leave my reader with an emotionally inspiring or engaging message?

Conclusion Infographic



Transition from your last paragraph

How can you connect your paragraph back to your central claim?

Restate your supporting claims

What do you want your reader to remember from your piece?

Think of how you can inspire your reader to act or reflect

How can you leave your reader breathless? Inspired? Filled with emotion? Bring it all home here.

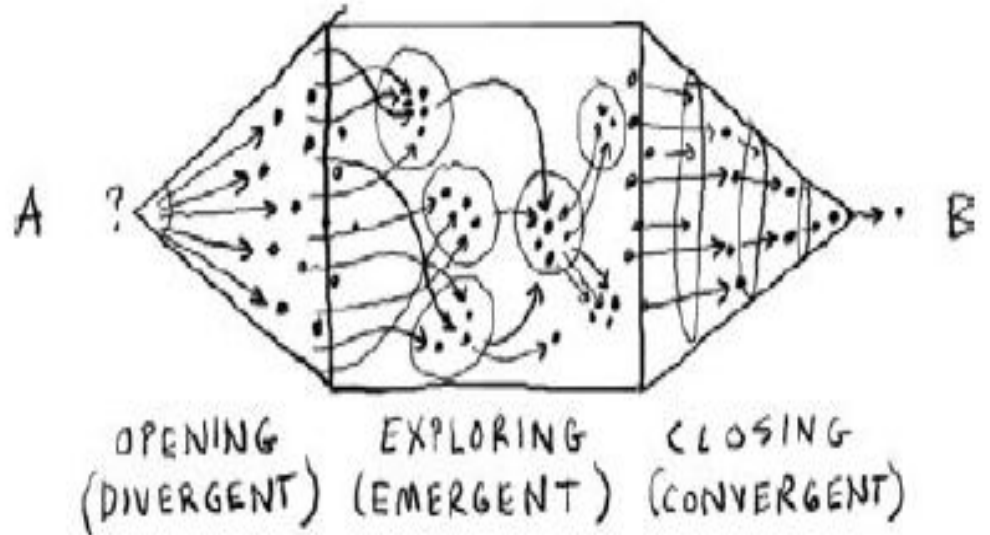
IV. Planning Your Essay

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Using essay mapping to visualize your structure

Essay Map: The Five Step System

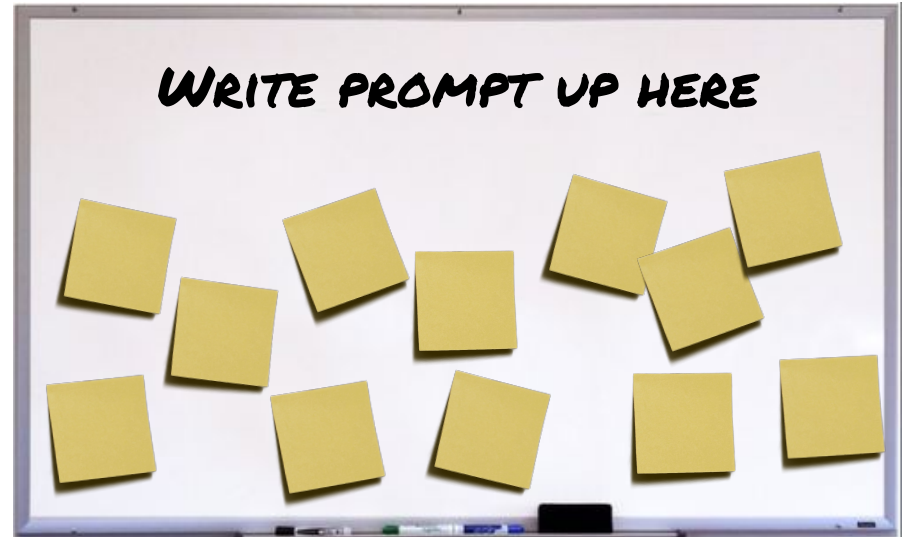
1. Brainstorm
2. Recognizing Patterns
3. Connecting Patterns
4. Creating a Thesis
5. Essay Mapping



Brainstorming



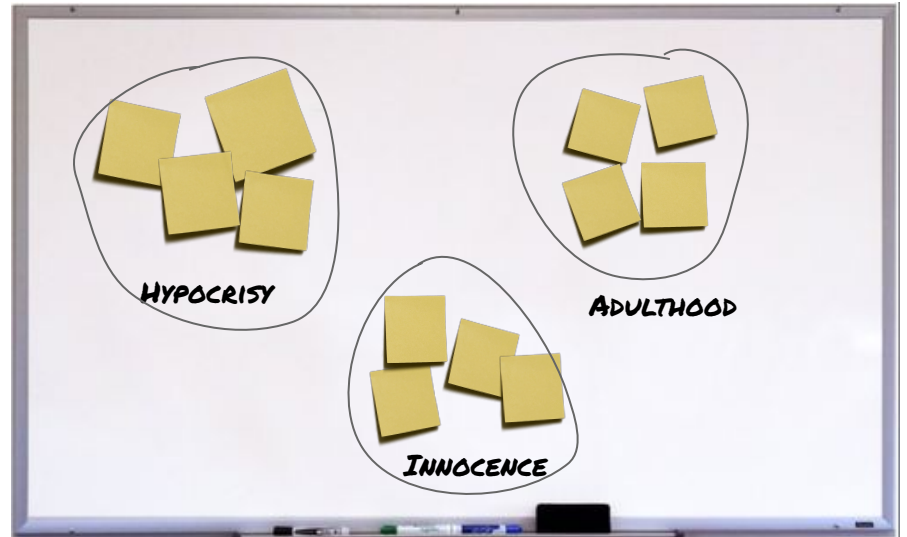
- Take a minute to read and reread your prompt. What is it really asking you?
- Write down as many ideas about the prompt as possible. Don't worry if they seem random and disconnected.
- Every idea gets its own post-it note. Place them all in the center of your desks.
- Feel free to discuss and collaborate. The more ideas, the better!



Finding Patterns

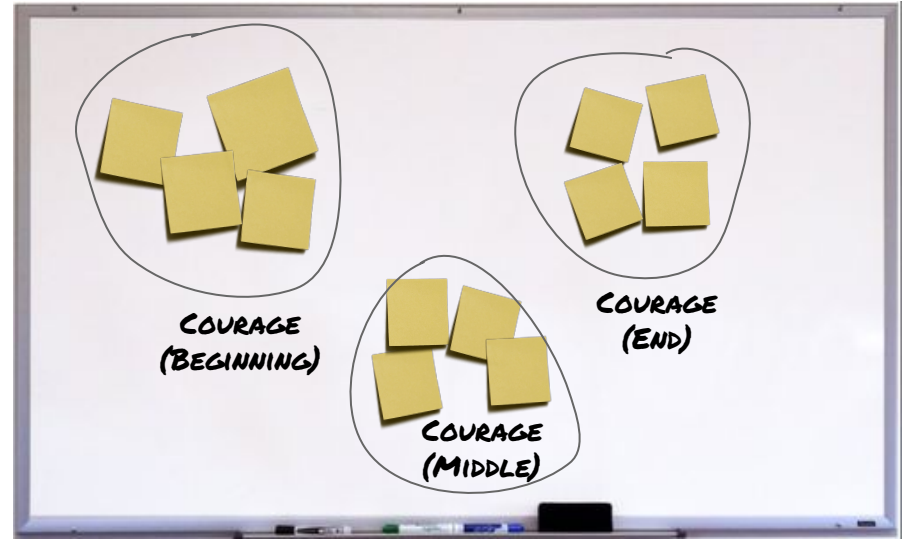
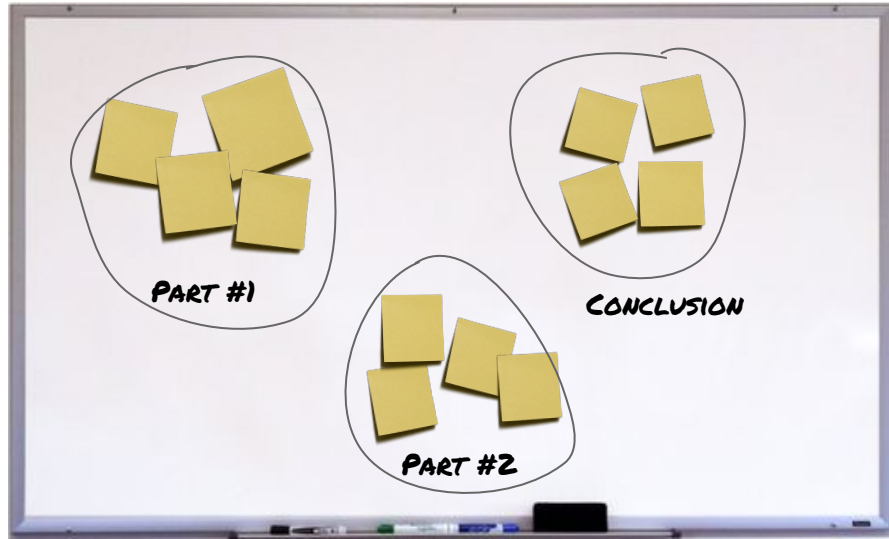


- Based on your ideas and the following discussion, patterns should begin to emerge.
- Create “concept containers” where you group your various ideas.
- Try to create at least two, but no more than four categories.
- Create a visual representation of your conceptual containers and label them.





Finding Patterns

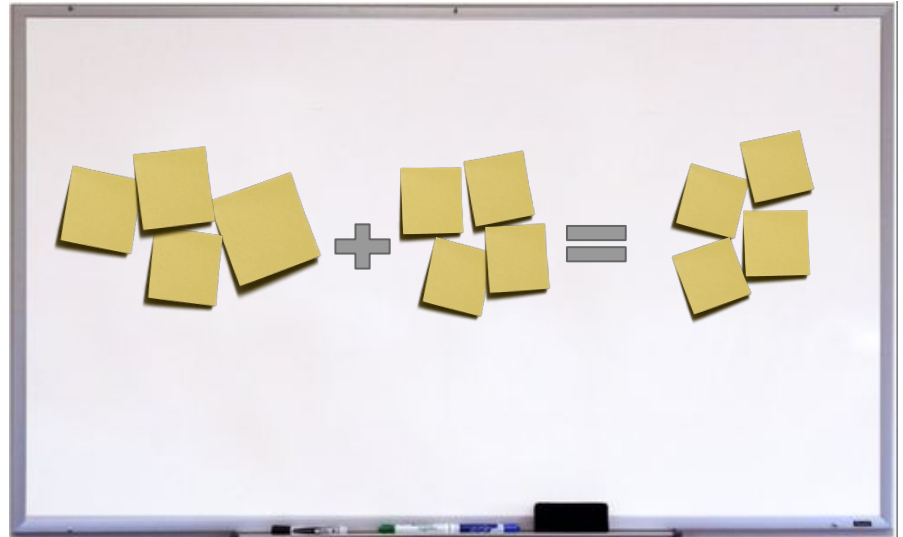




Connecting Patterns

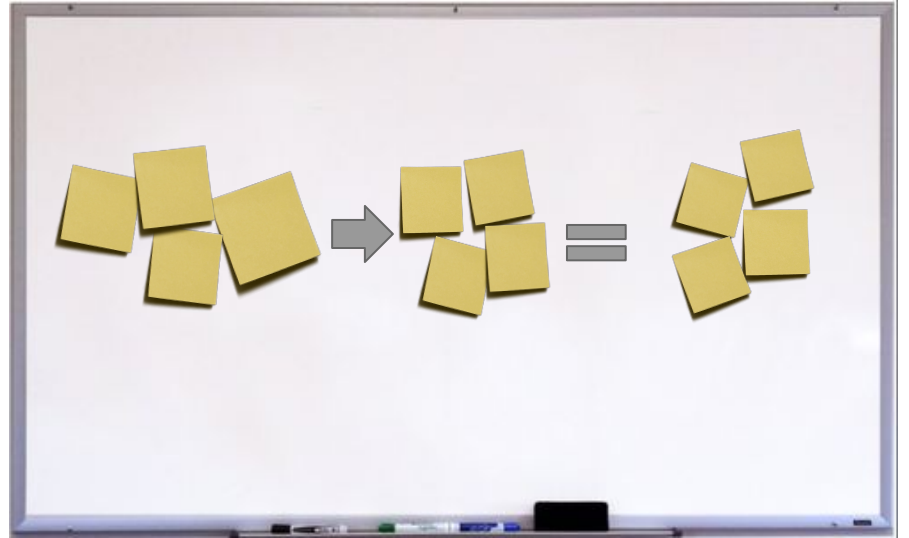
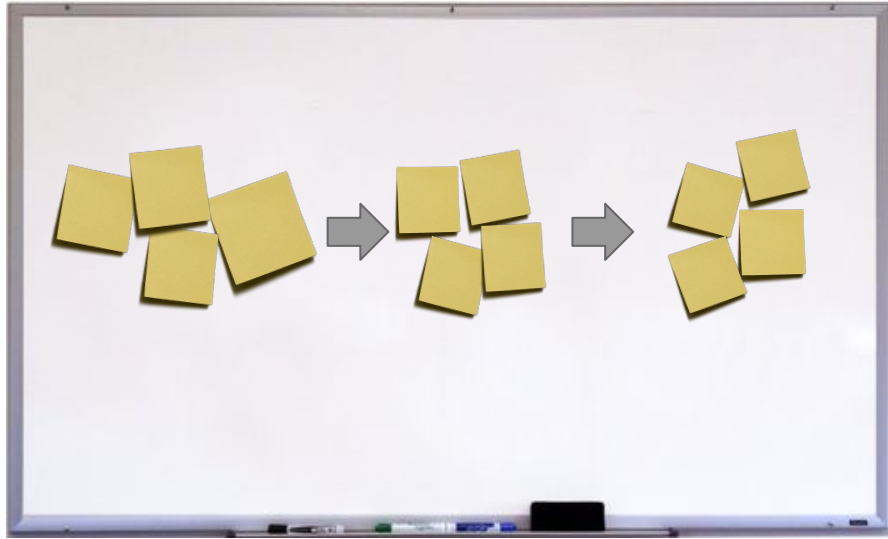


- Pattern forming was all about dividing and categorizing your ideas. Concept connection is about seeing how they work together.
- Consider the relationship between your ideas. How do they affect one another?
- What idea or thread can you weave all of these ideas together with?
- Map out the relationship between your concept containers using arrows, shapes, space, and color.





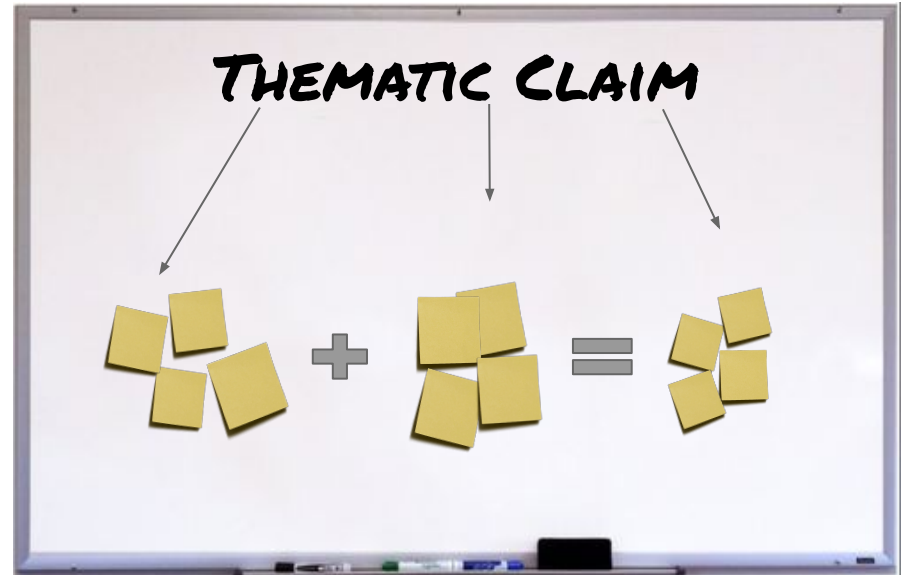
Connecting Patterns



Thematic Claim



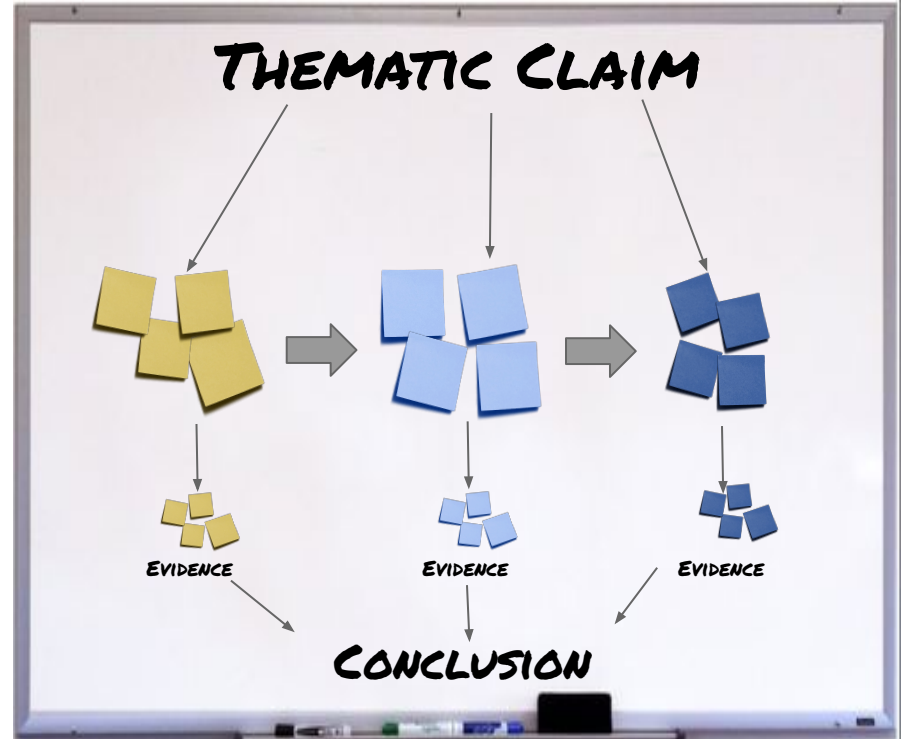
- Now that you've mapped out your paragraph topics and assessed how they work together, it's time to write a thesis.
- Your thematic claim should answer the prompt you were provided and preview the ideas you'll explore in your literary essay.
- Your thematic claim should reference both the text and the deeper message the author wants their reader to understand.



Essay Mapping



- Collect citations and evidence that you can use to support your concept containers.
- Using post-its, shapes, arrows, etc. lay out the entirety of your essay.
- Consider the various organizational strategies: chronological, cause/effect, problem/solution, etc.



THE RACIST, HYPOCRITICAL BEHAVIOR OF MAYCOMB'S RESIDENTS REVEAL THE VARIETY OF WAYS PREJUDICE CAN DIMINISH EMPATHY AND BLIND PEOPLE TO INJUSTICE; LEADING THEM TO BEHAVE IN WAYS THAT CONTRADICT THEIR STATED VALUES.

MRS. GATES INABILITY TO RECOGNIZE THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE HATE SHE CONDEMNS IN CLASS AND THE HATE SHE PERPETUATES TOWARDS MAYCOMB'S BLACK COMMUNITY ILLUSTRATES HER PREJUDICE AND HYPOCRISY.

SUPPORTING CLAIM #2

SUPPORTING CLAIM #3



EVIDENCE



EVIDENCE



EVIDENCE

TRANSITION
BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS

TRANSITION
BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS



REASONING



REASONING



REASONING

CONCLUSION