

Write a Thesis Statement

What is a thesis statement?

The thesis statement describes the author's position on a topic in the book. The thesis statement **must be supported through evidence from the book** throughout the paper. It is usually presented in one sentence. Examples:

- ✓ *Watership Down*, by Richard Adams, is an enjoyable, exciting fable that illustrates man's search for freedom and self-governance amid flawed and dangerous political alternatives.
 - ✓ "Romeo and Juliet," by William Shakespeare, is a timeless tragedy about the destructive consequences of allowing your desires to control you, as demonstrated by the title characters, as well as Lord and Lady Capulet, and Tybalt Capulet.
 - ✓ Although most people view the character Professor Snape, from the Harry Potter book series by J. K. Rowling, as an antagonist, there is much evidence that — though conflicted and flawed — he is a loyal friend of Albus Dumbledore.
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Here are some guidelines for finding and writing your thesis statement.



When writing a thesis statement, avoid stating **what happens in the book**. This is not a book report; it is a literary analysis essay.



In *The Secret Garden*, by Francis Hodgson Burnett, a girl named Mary finds herself orphaned, goes to live with a distant relative, and discovers an abandoned garden, which she secretly decides to begin working on.



In *The Secret Garden*, by Francis Hodgson Burnett, the orphaned Mary goes to live with a distant relative, and discovers an abandoned garden, which, as she brings it back to life, becomes a metaphor for the reawakened hearts of Mary, Master Craven, and his son, Colin.



To find your thesis statement, ask yourself, "Why did the author write this book? What was he or she trying to tell or show the reader? What's the point?"



You may overlay your own opinion or perspective onto the author's work, but you're not arguing *against* the motive of the author. You're simply giving your interpretation. You must support your thesis with evidence from the text.



In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a central question was whether the "hound" was real or a ghost, but since there's no such thing as ghosts, this is a moot point; it had to be real (or a trick), and the reader knows this from the beginning.



Since Sir Arthur Conan Doyle believed the Darwinist thinking of his day, a central theme in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is how silly and superstitious it is to believe in a realm beyond the physical world.



Write more than one thesis statement. As you draft your essay, you may tweak, abandon, or re-write your thesis statement. Having options makes it easier to tighten up your essay as you go.

Here are some things to think about as you search for your thesis statement(s).

1. What are the major themes of the work? As yourself what the major events, people, or conflicts are *really* about? Look deeper than just what the book says. Think about what it means. The author is using the story to show something. What is it? EXAMPLE:

In Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge begins to value provision (money) over relationships early in life, but finds out that one's past does not dictate one's choices moving forward.

2. Do the names tell you anything?

In Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, Jack Dawkins is a masterful pickpocket who, although he is worldly enough to have the mannerisms of a man, is roughly Oliver's age. His name alludes to the jackdaw, a bird in the crow family, only smaller, with a dark face, like a mask. Crows steal food and often feed on carrion (dead animals). Dickens' choice of name for this character reveal much about him.

3. Is the setting particularly important? Does the time and place in which the story is set appear in the title, or function as a major character? Examples are Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, George Orwell's *1984*, and EM Forster's *A Passage to India*. In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, about a shipwreck and the title character's survival on an island, the setting is everything.
4. What causes conflict in the book? Remember the types of conflict (if not, look it up). Conflict reveals much about a character and often illuminates truth about human nature, as the author sees it. An example is *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding, in which a group of boys who end up alone on an island after a plane crash form their own violent society in which the strong subjugate the weak and law and order are abandoned.
5. Does the protagonist have a quest, a decision, or a goal? Does the protagonist realize something (does he or she fall in love, or desire to go somewhere, or have to do something, or have an action forced upon him/her by others, or find him/herself in extraordinary circumstances and make a decision to survive)?
6. What symbolism does the author use? Symbolism is very telling as to what the author is trying to say with the book. Look for symbols in names, events, objects, timing, locations, behaviors or habits, and even in dialog.

Ideas:
