

Creating Thesis Statements

Can you solve the thesis puzzle?

TEACHER GUIDE

AUDIENCE

Grades 4-5

TIME

60 minutes

STANDARDS

Social Studies

· Grade 4: C.S. 3, C.S. 4, C.S. 7, C.S. 13, C.S. 14

· Grade 5: C.S. 9

English Language Arts

· Grades 3-5: RL.4.1, RL.5.1, RI.4.2, RI.5.2, RI. 4.3, RI.5.3

Social and Emotional

· C1. 1.b, C3 1.b, D1. 1.b, E1. 1.b, E4. 1.b.

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Introduction

During this activity, students will puzzle out for themselves what makes a great thesis statement. Students will break down the different components of a thesis, and then, by experimenting with and combining these components, learn how to make a strong one. A strong thesis statement that makes a claim and states the topics' historical significance is the bedrock of any good Youth History Day Project. Learning this skill will help students not only in history but in other subjects as well.

Learning Objectives

- Students will understand the purpose of a thesis statement.
- Students will identify the different components of a thesis statement.
- Students will determine the qualities that separate a weak thesis statement from a strong one.

Materials

- Teacher guide
- Theses example slides
- Thesis Puzzle: Set 1
- Thesis Puzzle: Set 2
- Thesis Puzzle Teacher Sheet

Vocabulary

Thesis statement	A short statement that tells the reader of your project or paper what your topic is, what claim you are making, and why your topic is historically significant. The rest of the project or paper should support the thesis statement.
Claim	Something you are saying about your topic based on your research and analysis. Can be argued against and supported with evidence.
Historical Significance	How your topic has changed or impacted history, both in the short and long-term.

Program Outline

What is a Thesis Statement?

Ask your students what they think of when they hear 'thesis statement'. Explain that in a history project a thesis does a number of things:

- **It introduces your topic:** It lets the reader know what your topic is about so they know what to expect in the rest of the project.
- **It makes a claim:** This is a thought or idea you have about your topic that is based on the research you've done. We'll look at what a claim is more a little later in the lesson.
- **It shows Historical Significance:** This explains why you are writing on this topic. How has your topic effected history? Why should the reader be interested?
- **It provides a roadmap for the rest of your project:** Every other part of the project should help support your claim your topic's historical significance. This will help you when creating the rest of your project.

Parts of a Thesis Statement

Now that your students know what a thesis does and why they need one, explain that you are now going to breakdown the different parts that a good thesis should have. You can use slide 2 of the "Theses Example Slides" to demonstrate the different components of a thesis to your class.

- A. **Introduction:** This answers the "who, what when and where" questions of your topic. Be careful not to give too many details, just enough so the reader can understand what your topic is about. You can provide more details in the other parts of your project.
- B. **Claim:** This is a stance you have taken on you project after doing your research. It is not just a statement of fact. A claim should:
 - show your own thoughts and ideas about your topic. It shouldn't be something someone could find by reading an encyclopedia article or doing a quick Google search
 - be able to be reasonably argued against
 - be supported by evidence in the rest of your project

Example: If you say in your thesis "*The declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776*" that is just a statement of fact. Anyone can look that up anywhere. Instead what if you said "*Heavy taxes were the most important reason why the 13 colonies signed the Declaration of Independence*"? There were many different reasons the colonies broke away from Great Britain. Someone might argue that others were more important than taxation. It's your job to support your point of view in your project.

- C. **Historical Significance:** This tells the reader why your topic was important in history. In other words, it answers the question "so what"? Here are some things to keep in mind when talking about Historical Significance:
 - A topic does not have to be famous or have had a world-wide impact to be significant. Local topics can be significant as well.



- Some things are interesting, but may not be historically significant. An example are fads like the different TikTok challenges. They can be amusing, but anybody 50 years from now might have a hard time explaining what impact they had on history.

Explain to students that they don't have to write their thesis in exactly this way or always in this order, but these different components should always be found somewhere in their thesis.

What Makes a Great Thesis Statement?

Finally, here are a few things you can do to take your thesis from "okay" to "great"!

- **Keep it Short and Sweet:** The reader should be able to find your thesis and pick out your claim and historical significance quickly and easily. If you bury your thesis under a bunch of extra words and details, this might be harder to do. Your thesis statement should be 3-6 sentences long.
- **Connect to the Theme:** Every year, Youth History Day has a theme that every project should relate to in some way. Using words from the theme in your thesis is a great way to show the reader the connection your topic has to the theme right way. This can also be done for other school projects if your teacher has given you a theme or broader topic for you to write about.
- **Don't be Afraid to Change:** As you do more research, you might find evidence that changes your thoughts about your topic, especially your claim. If this happens, don't be afraid to change your thesis to match. This is what real historians do!

Pre Activity: Which Thesis Statement is Better

Use slides 3-5 of the "Theses Example Slides" to show your students pairs of thesis statements on the same topic. As a class, choose which thesis of each pair is the strongest, and discuss why.

Main Activity: Thesis Puzzles

- I. Divide students into groups of three or four. Give each group a printout of *Thesis Puzzle Pieces: Set 1*.
- II. Students will have 15 minutes to cut out each puzzle piece, and use them to make strong thesis statements.
- III. There are a few "wrong" pieces in each puzzle. These pieces are shaped so they physically do not fit with the rest of the pieces, but they also contain text that does not make for a strong thesis. After the students complete their puzzles, discuss what pieces they didn't use and why.
- IV. Next pass out *Thesis Puzzle Pieces: Set 2* and repeat step II. This set does not contain different shapes to indicate which pieces are the correct ones, and student must decide for themselves.
- V. Once again, discuss what thesis statements students were able to create, which pieces did they leave out, and why.



Creating Thesis Statements

Thesis Puzzle Teacher Answer Sheet

Puzzle Set 1

Thesis: *The Fugitive Slave Act was passed as part of the Compromise of 1850. It said that freedom seeking slaves must be returned to their owners even if they were in a free state. Though it was meant to settle differences between the North and the South, the Fugitive Slave Act angered many in Free States. This increased the debate around slavery. This became one of the causes of the Civil War.*

Unused Piece: *People caught helping escaped slaves could be fined \$1,000 and be put in jail for 6 months.*

- Claim piece: This does not make an argument or claim. But simply States a fact.

Unused Piece: *It wasn't repealed until 1864.*

- Historical Significance piece: Does not show the short or long term impact of the topic.

Thesis: *George Washington became the first president of the United States on April 30, 1789. He was the only person who could have led the government through the conflicts at home and the threats abroad that the new country faced. His leadership style made a model that all future presidents would follow.*

Unused Piece: *This is why he is the best president the U.S.A. has ever had.*

- Historical significance piece: Does not explain why the topic is significant in history.



Puzzle Set 2

Thesis: *In the early and mid-1800s, large waves of immigration came into Ohio. Most of the immigrants at this time were from Ireland and Germany. Immigration was one of the most important reasons for the huge growth in the economy and population of Ohio in the 1800's. The effect of these groups of immigrants on the culture of Ohio can still be seen today.*

Unused Piece: *In the early and mid-1800s, large waves of immigration came into Ohio. Many immigrants were Irish. They came to America Because the potato famine in Ireland. Many other immigrants were from Germany. Some Germans moved from Pennsylvania. They were looking for work and land for farms.*

- Introduction piece: Gives to many details that could be given in other parts of the project. May bury the claim and historical significance.

Unused Piece: *By 1860, 14% of Ohio's population were immigrants.*

- Claim piece: This does not make an argument or claim. But simply States a fact.

Thesis: *Many miles of canal were built in Ohio during the mid-1800s. This included the Ohio and Erie canal finished in 1833 and the Miami and Erie Canal finished in 1845. The Canals allowed famers and factory owners to sell more of their products to places further away. It also attracted many people to move to Ohio to work on the canals. This changed life in Ohio in many different ways. The canals helped to change Ohio into a center of industry and politics.*

Unused Piece: *By the 1850's most of the canals began to be replaced by railroads.*

- Historical Significance piece: Does not show the short or long-term impact of the topic.

