

What is the Structure of a Topic/Thesis sentence and Body Paragraph for a Literary Essay?

Here is the general structure of a thesis or topic sentence. It is in three parts, with a part that is factual, a part that interprets, and a part that relates to theme. Most important: both a thesis and a topic must be provable claims!

	What Question to ask?	In a thesis or topic sentence
Observation	“What” are you noticing about the text?	<u>Literary device</u> (FLISS, narrative, dramatic)
Explanation	“How” does that thing work or create meaning?	<u>Meaning</u> of the device. It’s <i>effect</i> .
Larger Implication	“Why” is it there in the text?	<u>Thematic implication</u> for the entire text and its <i>purpose</i> for the text’s message or authorial purpose.

Here is an example for a thesis statement:

Idea for a thesis	Full phrasing in a thesis
Setting	In <i>The Crucible</i> , the setting of a Puritan society is used
Critique forced conformity	to critique the forced conformity of the McCarthy Era,
people are afraid of differences	highlighting that people are often afraid of things or people who are different from them.

Here is an example for a topic sentence:

Idea for a topic sentence	Full phrasing of a topic sentence for a body paragraph
Dana’s bag = symbol of coping	Dana’s bag is a symbol
Coping with the Racist and dangerous South	Coping with the experiences of the racist and dangerous Antebellum South
Share trauma with husband, regain control	and to share her traumatic experiences with Kevin and to try and regain control

Paragraph Structure – PEAL

Point	State your argument in the form of an O/E/LI topic sentence. It should contain a literary device and make an interpretive claim about the text.
Evidence	Support from the text using any combination of a quote, paraphrase, or summary.
Analyze	Analyze and deconstruct the meaning of the textual information and how this proves your argument
Link	Link back to the topic sentence or thesis statement to conclude the paragraph.

Conclusion Paragraph – 4 R’s

R – Restate your thesis in a fresh and interesting way. Don’t repeat the entire thesis, but do return to your main thematic signal phrase or idea that you used in the thesis.

R – Reconsider how your argument is important to either character, conflict, setting, or symbol. This can be more than one sentence.

R – Relate your argument is important to the human condition or the textual lesson that the author is presenting. This can be more than one sentence.

R – wRap it up. Give a concluding sentence that gives closure to your argument.

For the samples below, the POINT is in regular text, the *EVIDENCE* is italicized, the **EXPLANATION** is bolded, and the LINK is underlined.

Sample 1

Thesis:

In her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston uses the **motif of the porch** as both a public and a private space in order to represent the impact of the community's judgment on Janie, as well as a personal place for Janie to tell her story to Pheoby. This reclaiming demonstrates her *development and the possibility of attaining self-actualization through experience and story*.

In the first chapter of the novel, Hurston shows us the negative environment created by the public space in Eatonville through the dialogue of the porch sitters. *Janie has returned to the town without her soulmate, Tea Cake, and the "sitters" are kind to her face, but make harsh and biting comments behind her back. The town sits in judgment of Janie, asking each other "What she doin' comin' back here in dem overhalls?" and "Where she left that young lad of a boy she went off her wid'?"* (2). **Here, the porch becomes a dangerous public place for Janie, who has just sat through the judgment of the white judge and jury in Tea Cake's death. The porch sitters, who have never forgiven her for not mourning her second husband, Mayor Joe Starks, passively say hello and welcome her back with saccharine sweetness, all the while whispering acerbic questions behind her back. However, Janie is used to this treatment from the Eatonville gossips, so she is able to continue on to the safety of her own house without allowing their negative judgments to impact her own view of herself. In doing this, Janie shows the reader a preview of her actualized self at the end of the novel; she shows us a woman who cares nothing for the judgment of others. She cares only about sharing her experience with her best friend.** However, Janie's attitude toward the porch sitters was not always this confident; in the middle chapters of the novel, the porch represented a place of community to which Janie was desperate to belong.

Sample 2

Thesis: Dana's bag symbolizes her modern, scientific knowledge and world view and represents a coping strategy to deal with the racist Antebellum South and her traumatic encounters with Rufus and his plantation.

Dana's bag is a symbol of her coping with her experiences of the racist and dangerous Antebellum South and to share her traumatic experiences with Kevin and to try and regain **control**. *She first gets the bag after her second return to the present when she regains consciousness after getting beaten by the Patroller and Kevin has tied it to her waist. First, the bag is a symbol of the stability of her relationship with Kevin because he gives it to her and it is similar to her view of him as her "anchor [and her] tie to [her] own world" (132), metaphorically stabilizing her in the storm of her unexpected travels to distant Maryland. Also, her second return is especially traumatic because she has been severely beaten by the Patroller and she realizes that she is not just an observer and savior of Rufus' life — as she was in the first return when she saves him from drowning — and this is the first time she is able to share her experiences and pain with her husband.* This important act of sharing and packing for her expected third return to Rufus' world gives her a degree of **control** (133) that she lacks in the racist south and is the only thing her loving husband can do to help to protect her.

Sample 3

In the beginning of the novel, see the "landlords" of "the Darkness" are represented as predators who feed on the villagers, just as stronger animals prey on weaker animals. This reveals the **corruption** that pervades all areas of India, rural and urban alike. *Balram describes the Stork, the Wild Boar, the Buffalo, and the Raven as the four landlords who control every part of the economy and trade in the Darkness, exploiting the villagers through extortion and violence. He says of them, "the Animals stayed and fed on the village, and everything that grew in it, until there was nothing left for anyone else to feed on" (21).* **Here, the Animals are predators that consume everything in the village, and they steal the life force of the village and its people until nothing is able to grow there. Consequently, the village and all the families in it are forced to subsist on the scraps the Animals leave them, which is not nearly enough for them to survive. Balram sees the Animals as the eventual death of the village, for if they eat and eat, the village will be starved to death.** This shows that the **corruption** of the Animals in the rural Darkness is a fatal disease that can end in nothing but the destruction of the village and the people who inhabit it.

We see this **corruption** continued in the urban setting of Delhi when Balram is being forced to take the blame for Pinky Madam's car accident when she kills the young boy. *Balram tells the Premier the story of him being taken behind closed doors and being strong-armed by Ashok and his brother, the Mongoose. Balram says this kind of treatment of the lower class is common: "The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse" (145).* **Of course, Balram is being ironic when he uses the words "good" and "solid" to describe masters like Ashok and the Mongoose. His tone is acerbic here because of his anger in being forced to give up his life for his master's, presumably because hers is worth more. Additionally, he says that even though drivers like him have left the villages and they have the illusion of moving up in class, their situation in the urban centers is no better than in the villages. The concept of leaving the Darkness for the promised land of Delhi was a farce, a show, and he sees himself as no better off working for Ashok than he was slaving away for his grandmother in the Darkness.** This shows that, no matter where a person is born in a corrupt society, he or she will be subject to **corruption**. Whether in the Darkness or in Delhi, the experience for Balram is the same: he has the boot of the middle-class master on his neck, forcing him into a bleak future.