

Thematic Essay Question

There will be one thematic essay question on the Regents Examination. It will count for 15 percent of the total points you may receive. This section of the exam requires you to understand, interpret, and explain a key social studies theme or concept.

In your essay, you should be able to:

- State a main idea in a thesis statement.
- Develop it and add supporting details.
- Summarize it with an effective conclusion.

Basic Characteristics

The Theme

This part of the question identifies a broad social studies theme that will be the general topic of your essay. The theme is given more focus by a brief statement that explains the theme.

The Task

The second part of a thematic essay question is the task. The task section usually has three parts and presents the instructions you will need to write your essay. Generally, you will be asked to define or describe a theme or concept, to give a specific number of examples or results, and then to evaluate the theme or concept in some way. Typical forms of evaluation include describing causes or effects and evaluating positive or negative aspects.

Strategies for the Thematic Essay Question

Keep the following strategies in mind as you approach a thematic essay question.

1. Read the entire question through first.
2. After you have read the question, brainstorm and write down any ideas you have.
3. After you have written down your initial ideas, begin to make a brief outline. Organization is important in writing a good essay. The outline does not need to be very detailed, but it should include enough information to help you remember all the points that you want to use in the essay. It should also help you to see whether your essay has a logical organization.
4. Use the suggestions to help you recall the importance of the theme in different places and times.
5. Develop your essay logically.
6. Do not merely list facts. Analyze and evaluate the information, and compare or contrast various aspects.
7. Make sure that you provide examples to support your ideas.
8. Make sure that you have completed each of the items listed in the task section.
9. Make sure that your essay has both a strong introduction and a strong conclusion. You cannot get full credit for your essay if either of these elements is missing or weak.

Writing Your Thematic Essay

Introduction

Take a position on the issue and develop your **thesis (what you are trying to prove)**. That is, sum up the theme and indicate the issues you will discuss in the body of your essay that you will use to prove your thesis. Without giving facts or examples, you must write a preview of what you will discuss in the body of the essay.

Geography has had an influence on the way people have lived throughout history. The presence of oil in the Middle East has a tremendous impact on the life of the people there. Another nation that has been affected by geography is Japan. Japan is an example of how geography can impact the political and economic history of a nation

In the body of the essay the topic you have chosen must now be explained, described, or argued. Each main idea that you wrote down in your diagram or chart will become one of the body paragraphs. Each body paragraph will have the same basic structure.

- Start each body paragraph with a topic sentence. This sentence states the main idea of the following paragraph. The supporting facts and views follow logically from the first topic sentence. (Japan is an island nation that isolated itself in the past.)
- Use separate paragraphs to discuss each topic, issue or argument that supports your thesis.
- *Elaboration* can be further description, explanation, or discussion. You must support the thesis with relevant facts, examples and details. Good writing uses specific information the reader can picture. Drawing examples, illustrations or analogies into your essay writing makes it more interesting, readable and stylish. Use examples to explain difficult information, abstract ideas and theories.

Although surrounded by desert, ancient Egypt was able to develop along the banks of the Nile River. The river flooded its banks each year, depositing extremely fertile soil. Egyptian farmers were able to grow surplus food to support those living in the city. The ability to support city-dwellers made the development of a complex civilization possible. (This is a sample and does not go into enough depth. At this point you could go into the advances the Egyptians made.)

Conclusion

- Your conclusion should summarize the theme or as well as what your main arguments you have used. Do not present factual information of the essay to the conclusion, they belong in the body. .

Therefore, we can see that the geographical features of an area can often affect historical developments taking place there. Ancient Egypt has shown that geography can play a role in helping a society develop into a complex civilization with an advanced culture. Japan has shown that a country can use its geography to isolate itself and keep other ideas from influencing their own complex culture.

I. Organizing Your Ideas

The purpose of an outline, diagram or chart is to put your ideas about the topic on paper, in an organized format. Decide whether you prefer the cut-and-dried structure of an outline or a more flowing structure.

Diagram

1. Begin your diagram with a circle or line or whatever shape you prefer in the middle of the page.
2. Inside the shape or on the line, write your topic.
3. From your center shape or line, draw three or four lines out into the page.
4. At the end of each of these lines, draw another circle or horizontal line.
5. In each shape or on each line, write the main ideas that you have about your topic, or the main points that you want to make.
6. From each of your main ideas, draw three or four lines out into the page.
7. At the end of each of these lines, draw another circle or horizontal line or whatever you drew in the center of the page.
8. In each shape or on each line, write the facts or information that supports that main idea.
9. Throughout your essay, make specific reference to the terms of the question to ensure that you are answering all aspects of the question.

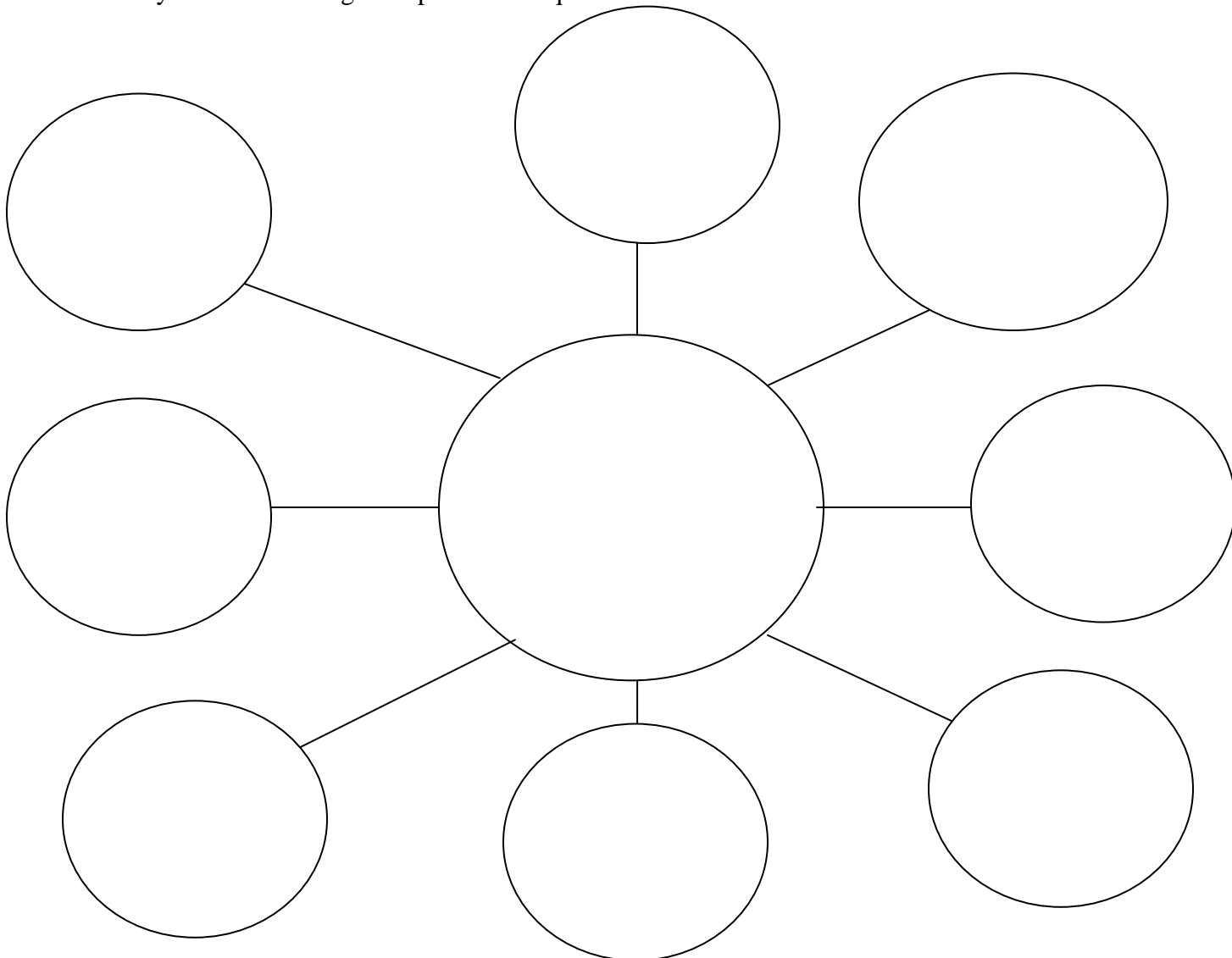


Chart: Draw a table or box that can be used to organize information and help in writing the essay response. Clearly label the one column heading “Tasks” and the following column heading(s) with the example(s) you wish to discuss. Lastly, reserve the row headings for the individual task items.

Thematic Essay Chart

Task	Egypt	Japan
Task # 1: Select one geographic feature from your study of Global History	River Valley	Island
Task # 2: Explain how this geographic feature has had an effect on the historical development of two nations or regions.	1. Floods yearly, leaving fertile soil. 2. Grow surplus food able to support large populations. 3. Led to advanced civilization.	1. Protection, isolation. 2. Need for natural resources.
Task # 3: Be sure to include specific historical examples in your essay.	1. Pyramids 2. Hieroglyphics	1. Opening Japan by U.S. 2. Meiji Restoration. 3. Imperializing Asia.