

Name: _____

Date: _____

6B- _____

Writing: Notes on the Sinker / THESIS

“The Sinker” / THESIS: In 1 sentence, provide a **general answer to the essay assignment or essay question**. A thesis is the **main idea** of an *entire essay*. It must be a provable **OPINION**, not a fact. Think of a thesis as a theory. A thesis tells readers what you think. It is, in a sentence, your position, argument, opinion, or assertion. Your entire essay is based on your thesis. Every sentence in your essay should contribute to introducing, supporting, or extending upon your thesis.

To write a thesis:

1. Find the question: Figure out what the essay assignment is asking you. Sometimes, an essay assignment won’t ask you an actual question; instead, the assignment will come in the form of a statement. If this happens, then try to think of the assignment in terms of a question.

Essay assignment: Describe a main character in the story.

Assignment as a question: Which character trait best describes the main character of the story?

2. Gather evidence: Once you’ve figured out the essay question, gather evidence to answer it. Look through the book, story, poem, article, etc. for a quote or quotes that support the question in a convincing way.

Strong Quotes:

- A strong quote is usually made up of **startling or dramatic language** that delivers a **powerful, deeply revealing, “showing” idea** in brief terms; it might include **poetic language**. Good quotes often allow writers to make inferences. Sometimes, however, they will state your point in direct terms that seem to invite more discussion but that — in your opinion, argued from your point of view — leave little room for debate.
- A strong quote should be relevant to the essay question; in essence, it will appear custom-made for your essay.
- A strong quote often borrows the authority or expertise of the author, the narrator, or a key character from the text to express the same idea you’d like to communicate in your essay.

(over)

*A strong quote is often the most powerful piece of evidence you can present in an essay, but, when a strong quote isn't available, you can use convincing text details, examples, instead. To do this, summarize, in your own words, the facts or main events of a scene, paragraph, stanza, etc. Make sure you include only those details that are relevant to your point; don't simply re-tell the entire scene, paragraph, or stanza. **Be specific!**

3. Working "Backward": Evidence to Thesis: Using your evidence, work backwards to write your thesis. Ask yourself, What does my evidence lead me to believe about the essay question? The answer is your thesis! Remember that your thesis must be an *opinion*; your thesis should not be a fact that is undeniable. It should represent your point of view about the evidence. Basically, it should state your position on a topic, giving your reader a sense of where you stand on an issue that is in some way up for debate. If your thesis only states a fact, then you haven't given your reader a reason to continue reading.

Essay question: Which character trait best describes the main character of the story?

Debatable thesis: Through his relationship with Sophie Donnelly, Capricorn Anderson demonstrates that he is a wise character. (*Wise* is debatable.)

Not debatable thesis: During his attendance at C-Average Middle School, Capricorn Anderson helps Sophie learn to drive. (How do you *argue* a fact?)

Guidelines for a good thesis:

A good thesis should...

1. relate to the hook.
2. answer the essay question.
3. be more general than the topic sentence(s) of the body paragraph(s).
4. be tied specifically to the evidence, rather than going *beyond* the evidence.
5. be an opinion, not a fact.
6. "flow" with the line, in terms of wording. Use an introductory expression.
7. be the main idea of the entire essay.
8. present a position or point-of-view that is *debatable*.
9. relate logically to the evidence; be the point that the evidence makes.
10. provide a thoughtful, insightful, and true response to the essay assignment.

(next)

Sample thesis:

Loyalty. It's more than a blind commitment to something. In Red Scarf Girl, twelve-year-old Ji-li Jiang, the author and main character of this memoir, has had a strong sense of commitment to her family and her country, China. However, in 1966, when the story is set, Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution sweeps through Ji-li's city, Shanghai, and challenges Ji-li to re-define her loyalties. **As Ji-li goes through this troubling process, the author examines the theme of loyalty during the Communist Revolution in China.**

Things to consider:

1. The more specific your thesis, the more specific your body paragraph(s) must be. A specific thesis is good but only if you can support it with a more specific topic sentence and even more specific evidence in your body paragraph(s). If in doubt, keep the thesis *general*.
2. You don't need to *focus* on your evidence in your thesis; in effect, this is what the topic sentences of your body paragraphs do. You may simply state your point of view in your thesis and then *focus* on the evidence in the your topic sentence(s).
3. Sometimes, you can use a trick in your thesis: You can simply turn the essay question into a statement. And then, in your topic sentence(s), you can support your thesis, often by answering the question *how* or *why* for your thesis. For example:

Question: How does the conflict of this story affect the main character?

Thesis: The conflict of this story affects the main character in various ways.

Topic Sentence #1: First, Tom becomes more mature when his friends reject him.

Topic Sentence #2: Secondly, Tom gains confidence in his choices when he has to fend for himself, without his friends' help.

Topic Sentence #3: Finally, Tom gains independence when he moves to a new town.

