

GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY: COMPARING THESIS STATEMENTS

Sharing thesis statements with students—both good and bad—can help them understand the characteristics they should be striving for in their own work. Share the following thesis statements with your students on the chalkboard or overhead. Ask them to brainstorm possible problems or positive characteristics of each. Keep in mind that even the “Best” statements are a work in progress!

	Needs Improvement	Better	Good
Susan B. Anthony	<p>Why was Susan B. Anthony so important in history?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This is a question. Not a statement.</i> • <i>Lacks the author’s opinion—what are you trying to prove?</i> • <i>Needs to be more specific about her impact in history.</i> • <i>Needs theme connection.</i> 	<p>Susan B. Anthony fought for the right to vote. The 19th amendment was passed in 1919.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Needs to do more than state a fact.</i> • <i>Needs more information about Anthony’s own role and its significance in history.</i> • <i>Needs theme connection.</i> 	<p>Through social action and her writings, Susan B. Anthony inspired thousands to take a stand on the issue of suffrage, which fueled the women’s rights revolution and eventually resulted in the 19th amendment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Discusses significance in history.</i> • <i>Specific about means and ends.</i> • <i>Has a connection to the theme.</i>
Martin Luther	<p>Martin Luther was born in 1483. He started the Reformation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Needs to do more than state a fact.</i> • <i>Needs a theme connection.</i> • <i>So what? Needs to discuss significance of Reformation.</i> 	<p>Despite opposition, Martin Luther used his 95 theses to take a stand against the Roman Catholic Church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>So what? Needs to discuss the outcome and significance of his actions in history.</i> • <i>Needs theme connection.</i> 	<p>Martin Luther took action against certain aspects of Roman Catholic religious practices through his 95 theses, which sparked a religious revolution, inspired a new sect of faith, and later motivated reform in the Roman Catholic Church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Discusses actions and significance.</i> • <i>Has a connection to theme.</i>
Chemical Warfare	<p>The use of chemical warfare during World War I was wrong.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Needs to do more than just state an opinion.</i> • <i>Needs a theme connection.</i> 	<p>The introduction of chemical warfare during World War I was a revolution in warfare. It prompted countries to use new tactics and develop new equipment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Connects to the theme.</i> • <i>Could move beyond just new technology—what are some of the more significant impacts of this topic?</i> 	<p>The use of chlorine gas at Ypres in 1915 by the German Empire represented a revolution in modern warfare, prompting reforms in the use of chemical warfare through the Geneva Protocol.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Has a theme connection.</i> • <i>Discusses impact in history.</i>
Earth Day	<p>Earth Day was first celebrated in April 1970 and we still celebrate it today.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Needs to do more than state a fact.</i> • <i>Needs a theme connection.</i> • <i>So what? Needs to discuss the impact that Earth Day has had in history.</i> 	<p>Earth Day was a revolution for the environment and changed everything!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Has a theme connection!</i> • <i>Needs to be more specific about the impact of the topic.</i> • <i>Can we connect it to larger issues in history?</i> 	<p>Beginning as a teach-in about environmental issues, Earth Day represented the reaction of many people to changes in the environment and increased public and governmental demand for reform about the environment, marking the start of the modern environmental movement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Has a theme connection.</i> • <i>Discusses significance.</i>
Bennett Law	<p>The Bennett Law, which made English the only permissible language for public and private education in Wisconsin, was enacted in 1890 and later repealed. Decide for yourself if this was a success or failure!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Needs to take a stand on the issue!</i> • <i>So what? What impact did this have for education? On immigrant groups?</i> 	<p>The Bennett Law, which was later repealed, made English the only permissible language for public and private education in Wisconsin and was enacted in 1890 in an attempt to resolve the debate over the assimilation of immigrant children into mainstream American culture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>So what? Still need to discuss the impact this legislation had in history.</i> 	<p>In response to dramatic changes in immigration, the 1890 Bennett Law was a major reform in education that, although later repealed, laid the foundation for a continued debate over the role of education and language in the assimilation of immigrant children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Specific about outcomes. Has theme connection.</i>