

# LESSON: PROJECT ORGANIZATION – THESIS DEVELOPMENT

**Essential Questions:** 1. What is a thesis statement? 2. How is a History Day thesis statement similar to or different from an English/Language Arts thesis statement?

**Objective:** At the end of this lesson students will be able to write a thesis statement for their History Day project.

**Grade Level:** 6 – 12

**Time Needed:** 90 minutes

**Materials: Worksheet: Thesis Development,** pencil, notes

## Procedure

1. Ask students if they know the definition of a thesis statement. Based on their responses, expand on what they already know discuss the definition and role of a thesis statement. A thesis statement:
  - Tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.
  - Is a road map for the project. In other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the project.
  - Directly answers the question asked of you. A thesis is an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject itself. The subject, or topic, of an essay might be World War II or Moby Dick; a thesis must then offer a way to understand the war or the novel.
  - Makes a claim that others might dispute.
  - Is usually a single sentence somewhere in your first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader. The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.
2. Based on the experiences that students may have had in other classes, discuss what students might be familiar with for writing thesis statements in English class.
3. Go, write! (Just kidding). Using the **Worksheet: Thesis Development**, walk through a sample thesis writing process with a topic that students already know. Pick a topic that no one has – so you are not writing a thesis for a student. Abraham Lincoln and Rosa Parks are provided as samples. Before beginning, discuss topic narrowing with students: *What specific issues are we going to focus on for either of those topics – we won't be able to cover their entire life.*
4. Get students to brainstorm what they already know about either topic. Write Abraham Lincoln or Rosa Parks on the board and list about five or six facts about either of them.
5. In looking at the facts on the board, it could be a great time to discuss the balance between interesting vs. important. *Using some of the facts on the board, think also about information you want to include in your statement. If I am doing a project on Abraham Lincoln, is his birthday important? Should I put that in my thesis statement?*
6. Then begin the **Worksheet: Thesis Development** as a group for the sample topic. Answer Who? What? Where? When? Why? What is my theme connection? Sample responses are available on the **Thesis Development Worksheet Information** page.
7. Once you get to the “why is this important” and “what was the impact” questions, it’s a good time to discuss how these are key questions for thesis statements. The answers to these questions will let people know why this topic is important to study.
8. Before writing the thesis statement, brainstorm and discuss the characteristics of a good History Day thesis. (Addresses a specific issue, discusses significance in history, has a theme connection)

9. Ask students to begin completing this worksheet for their own topic. Remind students that their thesis can – and should – change over time as they find more research.

### **Lesson Extension/Alternative**

**Individual Thesis Discussions:** Use the outside resources such as History Day mentors, staff, parents, and other adults in the community to help students and sit with them to prompt them to answer questions.

**Reverse Thesis Statement:** Have a thesis statement on the board. Using the Thesis Development Worksheet, take it apart. Find the answers in the thesis statement (who, what, etc.). Then ask how this can be proven and help the students answer that question by giving examples of research and sources already discovered. The thesis statement is like a road map of the project. They should also find a clue for background, build-up, impact, and significance.

**Thesis Pitfalls:** If students have already written thesis statements, discuss common pitfalls in History Day thesis statements. Things to avoid when writing a thesis statement: hope, forever, always, dreams. These are very broad words and can be challenging to prove.

**Current Events:** Instead of using an historic topic as the class thesis statement, write one using a current event or popular culture issue/item as most students will be more familiar with it.

**Additional Resources:** The following resources may be useful in familiarizing students with the characteristics of good thesis statements:

- Shows the progression of the development of thesis statements, encouraging students to keep improving their thesis after the first draft.

# THESIS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHEET INFORMATION

## Fun facts about Abraham Lincoln:

- Born February 12, 1809
- Died April 15, 1865, age 58
- Married Mary Todd
- 4 sons, only 1 lived to adulthood
- 8 years in Illinois Legislature
- Famous debates with Stephen Douglas in 1858 in Senate race
- Aquarius
- His face is on the \$5, and the penny
- Age 52 when he took office in 1861
- His Vice Presidents were Hannibal Hamlin and Andrew Johnson
- Six feet four inches tall

## Questions from Thesis Development Worksheet:

1. **Topic:** Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation
2. **Who:** Abraham Lincoln
3. **What:** To threaten the Confederacy into ending war, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation to free all slaves in rebelling states and counties.
4. **Where:** America, D.C., South (rebelling states and counties)
5. **When:** January 1, 1863, first draft was in July 1862
6. **Why did it happen:** To end slavery and convince the South to rejoin the Union, gain military strength as freed slaves could join the Union Army.
7. **Why is it important?** Psychological boost to abolitionist argument. It changed the legal status of slaves in rebelling areas. It also made the Civil War officially about freeing slaves and not just about restoring the Union as Lincoln stated in his Inaugural Address.
8. **How was this topic connected to Triumph and Tragedy in History?** The North and South were unable to compromise on the issue of slavery, which resulted in a military conflict in the Civil War.
9. **What was the impact or historical significance?** The lasting legacy of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation made the Civil War officially about freeing slaves and not just restoring the Union.

**Thesis:** On January 1, 1863, during heightened concerns about Union victory in the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing enslaved people in the Confederate States. While the proclamation was only a technical triumph for enslaved people, it did make the ending of slavery an explicit war goal, inspire Union troops, and laid the foundation for the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment.

# WORKSHEET: THESIS DEVELOPMENT

## Sample: The Montgomery Bus Boycott

**WHO:** Who was involved? Who was affected? *Rosa Parks, Citizens in Montgomery, Civil Rights Movement leaders, Montgomery's government officials*

**WHAT:** What happened? *Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, which violated a law enforcing segregation on Montgomery city buses. She was arrested and went to jail. Civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., organized a boycott of buses and challenged the law as unconstitutional.*

**WHERE:** Where was/were the place(s) it took place? *Montgomery, Alabama*

**WHEN:** When did it happen? How long of a time period was it? *Rosa Parks was arrested on December 1, 1955. The boycott started on December 5 and lasted for 381 days.*

**WHY:** Why did it happen? What caused it? *Civil Rights Movement leaders wanted to overturn segregation laws. Rosa Parks attended training for non-violent protest at the Highlander Folk School.*

**WHY:** Why is it important? What were the outcomes? *The boycott forced change in Montgomery and succeeded in overturning the law requiring racial segregation on public transportation. This success inspired other Civil Rights Movement protests and helped Martin Luther King, Jr. develop nonviolent strategies to fight segregation.*

### **THEME CONNECTION: Triumph and Tragedy in History**

- **Triumph:** After more than a year of protest, the boycott succeeded in raising awareness of injustice and legally challenging racial segregation on public transportation
- **Tragedy:** Racial segregation in the United States was a disastrous event and an unjust chapter in history that led to discriminatory treatment of Americans.

**Put it all together into a thesis statement.**

**Protesting the tragedy of racial segregation, Rosa Parks was arrested on December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. Through the year-long bus boycott that followed, boycott leaders triumphed in desegregating public transportation, opening doors for other civil rights movement victories.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## WORKSHEET: THESIS DEVELOPMENT

**TOPIC:** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHO:** Who was involved? Who was affected?

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT:** What happened? What was the main event?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHERE:** Where was/were the place(s) it took place?

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHEN:** When did it happen? How long of a time period was it?

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHY:** Why did it happen? What caused it?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHY:** Why is it important? What were outcomes?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**THEME CONNECTION:** Triumph and Tragedy in History

- **Triumph:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- **Tragedy:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Put it all together into a thesis statement.**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**What evidence have you found that supports your thesis?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## HANDOUT: COMPARING THESIS STATEMENTS

Sharing thesis statements with students—both good and bad—can help them understand the characteristics they should strive 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 “Good” statements are a work in progress!

	Needs Improvement	Better	Good
<b>Truckers' Strike</b>	<p>The Minneapolis truckers' strike took place in the 1930s.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Do more than state a fact.</i></li> <li>• <i>What is the theme connection?</i></li> </ul>	<p>The Minneapolis truckers' strike took place in the 1930s. The employees took fought for their right to unionize.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>So what? Needs to discuss the outcome and significance of his actions in history.</i></li> </ul>	<p>In May 1934, tragedy struck Minnesota labor activism when a group of employers refused to recognize a newly formed teamsters union. The strike that followed brought the leadership of the union, the governor, and the Citizens Alliance into conflict. Two days of violence marked a turning point in the labor movement and paved the way for a major triumph in legislation protecting workers' rights.</p>
<b>Silent Spring</b>	<p>Rachel Carson wrote <i>Silent Spring</i> in 1962 and forever changed the environmental movement in the United States.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Be more specific. Saying that the book "forever changed" history is too broad.</i></li> <li>• <i>Needs a theme connection.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Rachel Carson became a leader for the environmental movement in the early 1960s when she published <i>Silent Spring</i>. People were outraged about the harm being done to the environment and the book sold more than a million copies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Public response and sales figures are short term reactions. Dig deeper for long-term significance and legacy.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Rachel Carson became a leader for the environmental movement in the early 1960s when she published her controversial book, <i>Silent Spring</i>, in response to the environmental tragedy caused by DDT. Her book increased public awareness of environmental concerns and culminated with the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, a triumph for environmental protection.</p>
<b>Mahatma Gandhi</b>	<p>Gandhi marched to the Arabian Sea to collect salt in April 1930. Why do you think he would do that? Read more below!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Don't give instructions to your viewer. Explain your ideas</i></li> <li>• <i>Don't include questions in your thesis. Provide answers.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Satyagraha was Gandhi's belief in peaceful, non-violent resistance. Martin Luther King, Jr. used this during the Civil Rights movement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>This thesis needs more detail connecting what Gandhi did and how it came to be used in other conflicts.</i></li> <li>• <i>Needs a theme connection.</i></li> </ul>	<p>In April 1930, Mahatma Gandhi led thousands of Indians on a march to the Arabian Sea to protest the British Salt Tax. British authorities responded to this civil disobedience and made more than 60,000 arrests. While it would take 17 more years for India to gain independence, the legacy of the Salt March and Gandhi's non-violent philosophy of Satyagraha was triumphant in proving the effectiveness of non-violence as an instrument of political change.</p>
<b>Abraham Lincoln</b>	<p>If Abraham Lincoln hadn't given the Emancipation Proclamation, the South would have won the Civil War. There would still be slavery in the United States.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>This is "what if" history, which cannot be supported by evidence.</i></li> <li>• <i>Focus your thesis on what happened and how it actually changed history.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Abraham Lincoln was a great leader because he was a born in 1809 to a poor family and eventually became president. He was honest and hardworking and more leaders today should be like him.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Avoid too much biography, especially in your thesis.</i></li> <li>• <i>Go beyond stating that he was a "good" or "bad" leader. Focus on how he showed leadership during a specific event/situation.</i></li> </ul>	<p>On January 1, 1863, during heightened concerns about Union victory in the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the enslaved people in the Confederate States. While the proclamation was only a technical triumph for enslaved people, it did make the ending of slavery an explicit war goal, inspire Union troops, and laid the foundation for the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment.</p>