

Developing your thesis

1. Your first task in writing an essay of opinion is to raise a question that is open to debate and significant enough for your reader to want to know your answer.
2. Think hard and carefully about the novels you have read to find an idea they have in common and then formulate an opinion on that idea which you can develop into a research paper.
3. Choose an issue that can be argued by way of examples from the novels you have read.
4. Even after you have selected your thesis, let your opinion continue to take shape in the process of gathering and organizing your material. Ideally, an opinion is the result of the process of investigation. Rather than find facts to fit a preconceived opinion, develop an opinion to fit the facts you have found.
5. **Be prepared to change your mind in the light of new evidence.**

The following are introductory paragraphs written by Great Valley students who have written successful research papers in the past. Read each paragraph and underline what you think is the thesis statement.

1. Willa Cather is an author who demonstrates an appreciation for an individual's ability to withstand difficult circumstances and depicts these characters in her books as heroes. Characters such as the immigrant Alexandra in *O Pioneers!* And Antonia in *My Antonia* face many challenges: the death of family members, taming the wild land, and facing a new and unknown world. ***These characters endure these hardships due to an inner strength that emerges from their relationship with the land.*** (closed; Lit device HOW thesis)
2. The American contemporary writer Pat Conroy is now the author of five novels. These novels include *The Boo*, *The Water is Wide*, *The Great Santini*, *The Lords of Discipline* and *The Prince of Tides*. In these novels Conroy has tackled the issues of racism, the abuse of authority, the South and its inbred values and perhaps, most significantly, the importance of the family unit to each individual. ***Conroy's novels show that forgiveness and respect are possible and necessary for all families.*** (open; overarching thematic discussion)
3. Many of Edith Wharton's novels are about the individual in conflict with a stable elite society. In such society there is but one choice to be made- whether or not to become a part of that society. However, as Wharton shows, the choice is not always an easy one. She depicts in her novels a society that provides economic stability and comfortable sanctuary, but only in return for the complete sacrifice of one's independence and individuality. The individual must choose. ***There is no middle ground, no compromise, only sacrifice of the inner self or rejection of and by the society. Wharton demonstrates the necessity for such choices by examining the intolerable tension that results due to the conflict between a character's emotions or intellect and society's norms.*** (closed; Lit device HOW thesis)

4. J.D. Salinger once said of young people that they were the best people he knew. It is not surprising then that his writing has predominately focused on their interests and concerns. According to Salinger, childhood is not merely the first phase of one's life; it is the only time of truth, innocence, and sincerity. He expresses this belief through the thoughts and experiences of his young protagonists. ***Through careful analysis of his works, it becomes evident that, to him, maturing is not a triumph, but a misfortune, a process of compromise and surrender to a harsh adult world.*** (open; overarching thematic discussion)

5. Francis Scott Fitzgerald is one of America's great Twentieth Century writers. His works portray the mood that was prevalent in American society during the 1920s. Many of his novels focused on the issues of wealth, corruption, and the exultation of youth during this period. Fitzgerald became known as a spokesperson for the Jazz Age, an era that began shortly after World War I and lasted about a decade, ending with the stock market crash in 1929. This decade was one of prosperity; however, it was also a decade of excess, disillusionment, and the abandonment of moral codes and values. ***The novels of Fitzgerald examine the destruction and disillusionment that results when an ambitious young hero abandons his own moral codes and values.*** (open; overarching thematic discussion)

6. Folklore, myth, and the Bible are all central references in the works of Toni Morrison. She combines the spiritual with the supernatural in a distinctly modern writing style. Underlying such allusions to past stories is Morrison's strong sense of her African-American heritage, a unique heritage of which she is very proud. Her ***attempt to connect contemporary situations with the cultural ancestry found in stories and myths reveals her belief that the past and present are inexorably interrelated. By establishing such connections, she has reintroduced an African-American folklore and myth to a generation of African-Americans long separated from its cultural past.*** (closed, lit device HOW thesis)