Open Ended Essay Thesis Paragraphs:

When you are writing for the third essay prompt, it is important that you address the idea of the prompt and how it reveals the meaning of the work as a whole. However, in the effort to put all of this into one sentence, many people are writing very convoluted sentences that don’t really make sense. Instead, we are going to work on writing thesis paragraphs that include an explanation of HOW your chosen novel relates to the prompt, and especially what it means.

A prose or poetry thesis statement or paragraph, however, will focus more on the devices that the author uses to create meaning. In an open-ended essay, you will almost never talk about things like tone, imagery, or figurative language. You may be asked to discuss a symbol, but it would be one that is crucial to the development of the whole work. The other devices will be considered in the essays that require a close reading of the text. We will look at those types of thesis statements in more detail later.

Consider the sets below.

**Example Set 1:**

AP Question: A bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, recounts the psychological or moral development of its protagonist from youth to maturity, when this character recognizes his or her place in the world. Select a single pivotal moment in the psychological or moral development of the protagonist of a bildungsroman. Then write a well-organized essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole.

You may choose a work from the list below or one of comparable literary merit. Do not merely summarize the plot.

1. What is the prompt asking you to focus on?
2. What is a book that you know of that would fit this prompt? Why?

1. What book do you think would NOT work well for this prompt?

**Directions**: For each of the thesis paragraphs below, consider: how well does this paragraph address the prompt? Is it clear HOW the book relates to the prompt, specifically? sHow well does it seem to speak to the meaning of the book as a whole? Finally, what level paper do you think this thesis came from?

1. In Voltaire’s 17th century novel Candide or Optimism, Candide struggles with a harsh world that continually cannot meet his optimistic expectations. From the moment that Candide is kicked out of his childhood home, he begins a process of moral growth that forces him to rethink the idealism he has been taught. At the end of the novel, Candide’s journey is culminated with his final conversation with his mentor Pangloss. Through Candide’s journey to this moment, Voltaire is able to criticize the philosophy of Leibniz and the general cruelty of European culture.
2. In Song of Solomon, by Toni Morrison the plot is centered around the story of Milkman Dead and the physical and psychological journey he embarks on to discover himself, to discover his family’s history, and to transform into a better person.
3. In the novel Heart of Darkness, the protagonist named Marlow undergoes a long, physically and mentally challenging journey through the Congo. In search of finding something more meaningful in his life, Marlow decides to take an offer to go to the Congo. Unaware of the reality of the situation upon arrival, Marlow is faced with horrors he had never imagined. After leaving the Congo, Marlow is a changed man who returns home a more aware and mature character.
4. In the story of Frankenstein, Victor Frankenstein creates a monster and then abandons it immediately, leaving it to begin its life on its own. The monster wanders the unknown land until he discovers who he is, and from there he learns that he does not belong to this world. This moment shapes the meaning of the story by giving the monster a purpose, learning to control the things you create, and the temptation of knowledge.

**Example Set 2:**

AP Question: In a novel by William Styron, a father tells his son that life “is a search for justice.”

Choose a character from a novel or play who responds in some significant way to justice or injustice. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the character’s understanding of justice, the degree to which the character’s search for justice is successful, and the significance of this search for the work as a whole.

1. What is the prompt asking you to focus on?
2. What is a book that you know of that would fit this prompt? Why?

1. What book do you think would NOT work well for this prompt?

**Directions**: For each of the thesis paragraphs below, consider: how well does this paragraph address the prompt? Is it clear HOW the book relates to the prompt? How well does it seem to speak to the meaning of the book as a whole? Finally, what level paper do you think this thesis came from?

1. In Pulitzer Prize winner Toni Morrison’s work Beloved, Morrison recounts the tale of how a mother Sethe killed her infant daughter Beloved out of the ultimate motherly love because of a perceived injustice “in a search for justice.” Although Seth’s actions are morally questionable to some, the fact that she carried them out to protect her daughter from the same injustice she remembered from back at Sweet Home cannot be contested.
2. In today’s society, justice is almost exclusively viewed as an obligation of those who have chosen to become civil servants; however, John Steinbeck in his novel The Grapes of Wrath portrays justice through the eyes of Tom Joad, as an inalienable human right, and it is often that the injustices that are committed against Tom and his family are carried out by the supposed guardians of that justice. As he progresses through the novel Tom realizes that justice is no concrete set of laws and regulations, but instead ultimately a facet of the human character, and that the purpose of that justice is to establish equality, not to be used as a device to subdue the weak by the strong.
3. Raskolnikov from Crime and Punishment changes the course of his life when he seeks to bring down the injustice of the pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanova. His understanding of justice, though, is slanted due to his excessive social isolation and his theory about supermen.
4. If life is a “search for justice,” then the story of Bigger in Native Son is clearly a misguided and misunderstood search for personal justice. Bigger actually responds to the injustice of racial discrimination on a level much larger than just one individual. His responses to all the injustices he faces in his time are quite significant in the work, and more so for showing the effects of racism, but they are far from successful to him as a character.