

# Theme Analysis Paper: Detailed Procedures

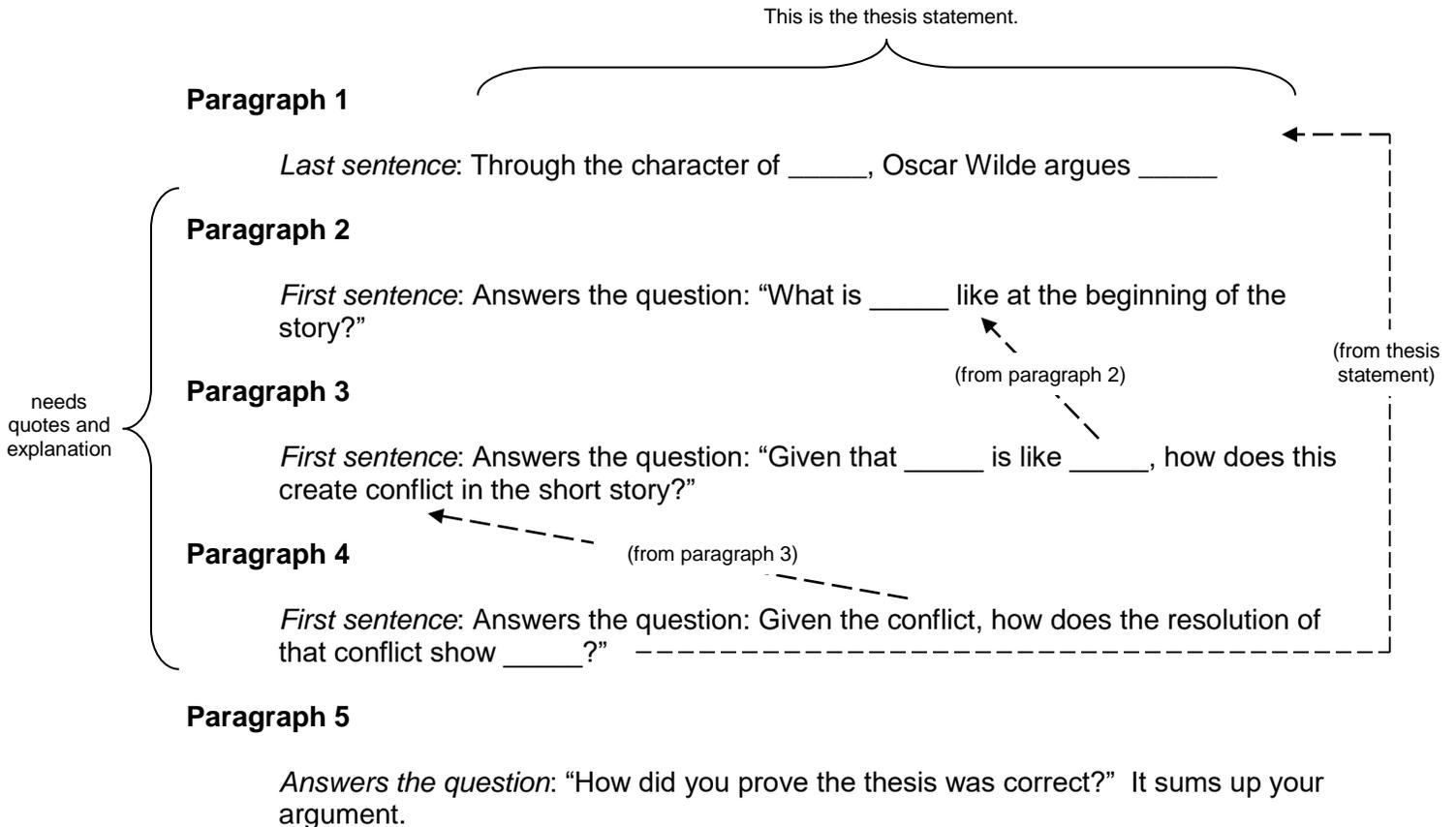
## Overview

The purpose of this paper is to show how Oscar Wilde develops his characters to advance his ideas (a theme in the short story). You will track (in writing) what a character is like at the beginning of the story, how this trait develops conflict in the short story, and how the resolution of that conflict demonstrates the story's point of view about kindness, compassion, moving forward, vanity, or courage.

A rough outline would like this:

- I. Introduction with thesis statement ("Through the character of \_\_\_\_\_, Oscar Wilde argues that \_\_\_\_\_")
- II. What a character is like. Choose the Otis family (treating them as a single character), Virginia, or the ghost. Choosing the ghost is the most straightforward choice.
- III. How this personality trait causes problems in the story (internal or external conflict)
- IV. How the resolution of this conflict demonstrates Oscar Wilde's ideas about kindness, compassion, moving forward, vanity, or courage
- V. Conclusion (sum up your argument)

Here is another way of visualizing the essay:



This is an overview, but you should write the paper in chunks. Start with an introductory paragraph.

## Introductory Paragraph

### Purpose:

An introductory paragraph provides the necessary background and establishes what it is that the paper is going to accomplish. This is the last sentence of the introduction, and it is called the **thesis**. The thesis is your argument, what you are going to prove to the reader.

### Directions:

The introductory paragraph (in this paper) should have the following characteristics:

- Author and title are clearly identified
- A short summary of the story (no more than 2-4 sentences). This summary should set up the conflict and suggest something of the way the story progresses. **It is not a blow-by-blow record of the plot. It should just set up the main characters and the conflict.**
- A **thesis statement** that establishes what the author is trying to accomplish by developing a specific character. This is what you are going to prove in this paper.

It should be some version of this sentence: "Through the character of \_\_\_\_\_, Oscar Wilde argues that \_\_\_\_\_."

The last part of the sentence should address what Oscar Wilde seems to be saying about kindness, moving forward, compassion, vanity, or courage. Think carefully about this because your argument must prove this statement to be true. Refer back to your theme organizer.

### Example (using William Hope Hodgson's "The Gateway of the Monster"):

William Hope Hodgson's "The Gateway of the Monster" tells the story of ghost finder Thomas Carnacki's attempt to uncover the secrets of a haunted house. The haunting, concentrated in a large mansion, is perpetrated by a malevolent ghost who slams doors at night and attacks anyone unlucky enough to brave the "Grey Room" after dark. In the course of his investigation, Carnacki must do battle with the forces of darkness in order to bring peace to the home. In this way, Hodgson uses the Carnacki character to demonstrate the necessity of overcoming fear in order to achieve one's goals.

← Author and title are identified. You will obviously be using "The Canterville Ghost," **not** "The Gateway of the Monster."

← The story is briefly summarized in very general terms (no more than four sentences). Notice I'm not telling the whole story.

← The last sentence of the introduction is a thesis statement. This announces what my paper will prove. You will also **not** refer to Hodgson (who wrote "Gateway of the Monster"), but Oscar Wilde.

My thesis statement is, "Hodgson uses the Carnacki character to demonstrate the necessity of overcoming fear in order to achieve one's goals." Your thesis should be some version of this sentence: "Through the character of \_\_\_\_\_, Oscar Wilde argues that \_\_\_\_\_."

## First Body Paragraph

### Purpose:

The first body paragraph will establish what the character you choose is like when they are first introduced. Although you are writing this in chunks, make sure you are choosing character traits that will cause conflict later in the story or else you will end up having to do more substantial re-writes.

Choose either the Otis family (treating them as a single character), Virginia, or the ghost.

### Directions:

The first body paragraph should display the following characteristics:

- A transitional word or phrase to indicate you are beginning a new idea
- A **topic sentence** that will indicate to the reader what you will accomplish in that paragraph (something like “At the beginning of the story [a character] could be described as...”)
- An introduction to evidence from the text
- Evidence from the text (one quote is a minimum if you are shooting for Cs; two quotes is what I really want)
- A discussion of how the evidence proves that your argument is correct (the explaining part)

### Example (using William Hope Hodgson’s “The Gateway of the Monster”):

At the beginning of the story, Carnacki’s interactions with the ghost are defined by his fear. For example, after Peter the butler introduces the psychic detective to the Grey Room, Carnacki begins laying out the seals that will test for movement in the room. However, after the clock strikes eleven, the spirit’s presence fills the room as a “cold wind,” and Carnacki has “a bit of work, not to start running” (4) in fear. Here, the normally level-headed detective’s resolve is undermined by this encounter with the supernatural, a fear caused not by any rational threat (as the ghost has yet to do anything), but by the primal reaction to forces beyond human understanding. For Carnacki, the predictable world of cause and effect is upended by the introduction of events with no logical explanation, lending a sense of strangeness to a setting that should be readily familiar. Similarly, in Carnacki’s second encounter with the specter, his reaction to the ghost’s presence is also fearful. After the spirit repeatedly slams the door of the grey room, Carnacki (awakened by the noise) rises from bed to confront it. Despite having a gun, however, the normally brave detective can “not go a step towards the Grey Room” (5). Paralyzed by terror, again he is able to muster the courage necessary to confront that which lies beyond human perception. As before, Carnacki intellectually understands that there is no logical

← A transition word or phrase identifies a new paragraph: **“At the beginning of the story...”**

← A topic sentence identifies what the paragraph will be about: **“Carnacki’s interactions with the ghost are defined by his fear.”** In other words: “At the beginning of the story the narrator is describing what he is like”

← Quotations are introduced to give it context. **It does not just say something like, “The story says, ‘...’” or “For example, ‘...’”**

← For each piece of evidence, there is an explaining part that indicates how the quote proves the topic sentence is correct. The explaining portion also makes up the majority of the paragraph.

basis for this feeling, but, as before, he is helpless in the face of an instinctual aversion to the unknown.

### How to format paragraphs with multiple pieces of evidence:

- Claim (your answer)
- [For example/instance], when/after/as [something happens], [the author] writes/[a character] thinks/says → Evidence<sub>1</sub>
- How Evidence<sub>1</sub> proves the claim is correct
- [This is like/Similarly/or some other transition], when/after/as [something happens], [the author] writes/[a character] thinks/says → Evidence<sub>2</sub>
- How Evidence<sub>2</sub> proves the claim is correct
- Sum up the argument in some way

Essays with paragraphs that only have one piece of evidence will not receive a grade higher than a C (even in revision).

### Helpful words and phrases:

#### To begin paragraphs:

- First
- At first
- In the first place
- To begin
- Initially
- At the beginning of the story

#### To introduce quotes:

- For example/instance
- As an example/illustration/demonstration
- To illustrate/demonstrate/explain
- One example/instance
- X states/explains/says, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- As X puts it/states/explains/says, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- When (something happens), (a character) states/explains/says, “\_\_\_\_\_.”

#### To establish the importance of something:

- X matters/is important because \_\_\_\_\_.
- Although X may seem unimportant/trivial, it is in fact crucial because it reveals/shows \_\_\_\_\_.
- X has important consequences for Y because \_\_\_\_\_.
- The significance of X is \_\_\_\_\_.
- When \_\_\_\_\_ states, “\_\_\_\_\_,” it establishes/demonstrates/illustrates/indicates/reveals/shows \_\_\_\_\_.

#### To comment on something implied or assumed:

- Although X never says it directly/explicitly, it is clear/obvious that \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- One implication of \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.
- While X never admits as much, it is clear/obvious that \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

- Although it might seem \_\_\_\_\_, in fact \_\_\_\_\_

## Second Body Paragraph

### **Purpose:**

The second body paragraph will establish how this character trait causes conflict for the character. Obviously you want to keep the point-of-view consistent, so don't start writing about Virginia if your first body paragraph was about the ghost.

### **Directions:**

The third body paragraph should display the following characteristics:

- A transitional word or phrase to indicate you are beginning a new idea
- A **topic sentence** that will indicate to the reader what you will accomplish in that paragraph (something like “[A character trait] creates conflict by \_\_\_\_\_”)
- An introduction to evidence from the text
- Evidence from the text (one quote is a minimum; two quotes is what I really want)
- A discussion of how the evidence proves that your argument is correct (the explaining part)

### **Example (using William Hope Hodgson’s “The Gateway of the Monster”):**

This fear, then, creates difficulties for Carnacki, as it interferes with his ability to do his job. For instance, it undermines Carnacki’s confidence in his abilities. After daylight comes and the fear subsides, Carnacki acknowledges that such lapses in nerve are an occupational hazard, nonetheless he admits that, “I always feel mean and miserable, after a time like that” (6). As a psychic investigator, Carnacki depends on his ability to master his fears in order to rationally determine the source of supernatural phenomena. This is obviously undermined by a detective too fearful to leave his bedroom. In the same way, there is only so much that can be accomplished without direct observation of the haunting, essentially restricting the investigation to daylight hours. Carnacki does this, examining “the walls, floor, and ceiling [...] with probe, hammer and magnifying glass,” but find “nothing suspicious” (7), nor will his seals be broken during daylight hours, as the manifestations are strictly a nocturnal affair. As a result, his investigations prove inconclusive and ultimately ineffectual. In both cases, then, Carnacki’s efforts are stymied by his inability to confront his fear.

← A topic sentence identifies what the paragraph will be about: **“This fear, then, creates difficulties for Carnacki, as it interferes with his ability to do his job.”** In other words: “[A character trait] creates conflict for the narrator by \_\_\_\_\_”

← Quotations are introduced to give it context. **It does not just say something like, “The story says, ‘...’” or “For example, ‘...’”**

← For each piece of evidence, there is an explaining part that indicates how the quote proves the topic sentence is correct.

**A reminder: essays with paragraphs that only have one piece of evidence will not receive a grade higher than a C (even in revision).**

## Helpful words and phrases:

### To begin paragraphs:

- Next
- However
- Thus
- From this
- Although \_\_\_\_\_, it causes \_\_\_\_\_

## Third Body Paragraph

### Purpose:

The third body paragraph is the most important part of your argument. Body paragraph one established character. Body paragraph two established how this characteristic created conflict with society. Body paragraph three completes the argument by showing how the resolution of the conflict reveals how the author feels about some bigger idea he is trying to communicate to the reader (theme). I have outlined six possibilities already (kindness, compassion, moving forward, compassion, vanity, or courage), and you should have identified already which one you are using in your thesis.

### Directions:

The third body paragraph should display the following characteristics:

- A transitional word or phrase to indicate you are beginning a new idea
- A **topic sentence** that will indicate to the reader what you will accomplish in that paragraph (something like “Through the resolution of this conflict, Oscar Wilde shows \_\_\_\_\_”)
- An introduction to evidence from the text
- Evidence from the text (one quote is a minimum; two quotes is what I really want)
- A discussion of how the evidence proves that your argument is correct (the explaining part)
- A discussion of how the resolution of the conflict from body paragraph two reveals theme

### Example (using William Hope Hodgson’s “The Gateway of the Monster”):

Thus, resolving this internal conflict is not only a necessary step to completing Carnacki’s investigation, but, more importantly, it reveals how overcoming fear is a pre-condition to achieving one’s goals. This is demonstrated by the effects of Carnacki’s decision to confront his fear and spend the night in the Grey Room. After constructing an elaborate defense against the supernatural consisting of a pentagram inscribed in a circle-- its barriers demarcated by ritualistic items and electrified by the current of a system of portable batteries and vacuum tubes-- Carnacki waits for the ghost to appear. When it does, it manifests as a giant fist that throttles the cat that the detective had placed in the room to test its intentions, turning next to confront Carnacki at the center of his Electric Pentagram. It is here that Carnacki’s resolve is tested, as the fist pounds again and again against his mystical defense. Though he feels “horribly gone and shaken” (14), however, Carnacki persists in his endeavor, refusing to give in

← A topic sentence identifies what the paragraph will be about: **“Resolving this internal conflict is not only a necessary step to completing Carnacki’s investigation, but, more importantly, it reveals how overcoming fear is a pre-condition to achieving one’s goals.”** In other words: “Through the resolution of this conflict, Oscar Wilde shows \_\_\_\_\_”

↖ Quotations are introduced to give it context. **It does not just say something like, “The story says, ‘...’” or “For example, ‘...’”**

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to the terror inspired by his supernatural antagonist. This is even true when the spirit begins to influence the “unconscious voluntary actions” that endanger the detective (15), as when Carnacki’s hands “accidentally” stray outside his defense or when he momentarily knocks over part of his defense while stretching. This, then, suggests Hodgson’s argument about the nature of courage. It is not, so much, the absence of fear, but the willingness to confront the fear that the author values, what makes Carnacki a hero. It would, in context of the story, be irrational (even foolhardy) not to be scared, since the ghost is not only malevolent but demonstrably capable of harm (when it murders the cat), so Carnacki is wise to exercise the caution of constructing a defense. Even though he is still fearful, though, he does not let his fear become an impediment to accomplishing what he knows must get done (in this case, to observe the actions of the spirit). In this way, bravery becomes the triumph of the human will over the unthinking instinctual responses that would paralyze us.

← The paragraph shows how the conflict changed the character in some way (how the conflict resolved). From this the reader/audience can understand what the author is arguing about life (theme).

### Helpful words and phrases:

#### To begin paragraphs:

- Next
- Last
- Finally
- From this

## Conclusion

### Purpose:

A conclusion sums up your arguments and expresses what has been accomplished over the course of the paper. It is often the shortest paragraph.

### Directions:

A conclusion should display the following characteristics:

- A transitional word or phrase to indicate you are concluding your argument
- A summary of what you have accomplished in the paper
- Refer back to the thesis statement (to demonstrate that you have proved it true)
- A conclusion is often the shortest paragraph in a paper
- A conclusion seldom has textual evidence

### Example (using William Hope Hodgson’s “The Gateway of the Monster”):

To conclude, the external conflict with the ghost is at least partially established by the internal conflict within Carnacki himself. Fear, specifically, fear of the unknown, creates a barrier to action that must be overcome if Carnacki is to solve the mystery of the apparition’s appearance. In

← A transition word or phrase identifies the conclusion: “To conclude...”

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overcoming this, then, the detective overcomes that which everyone must overcome if they are to achieve the things that seem impossible: namely the fear of actually making the attempt to do something extraordinary. In this way, Hodgson's story becomes an object lesson in the power of people to prevail in the face of adversity.



The argument (as a whole)  
is summarized and broad  
conclusions are drawn.

### Helpful words and phrases:

#### To conclude:

- Ultimately
- Hence
- To conclude
- Thus
- Fundamentally
- In brief
- In closing
- Therefore
- As a consequence of
- Consequently
- As a result
- In sum
- The end result