

The comparative thesis statement

There are three main approaches to the comparative thesis statement, and these come down to your preference to either emphasise the *similarities*; or to emphasise the *differences* between the two literary works. There is also a third, more simple option, if that is your preference. See the two different approaches below:

Question:	<i>Authors use the portrayal of characters who are somewhat trapped as a means to criticise society. Discuss the extent to which this is true.</i>
Texts:	Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> and Wilfred Owen's poetry

Include:

- The names of the works and the authors
- Key terms from question
- Acknowledge the similarities and differences
- Make an argument and share a rich idea

Approach 1: emphasising the similarities

While Owen's war poetry and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* use very different authorial choices to depict characters who are trapped, both authors address this theme in order to criticise society. This is powerfully seen in reference to Owen's criticism of government propaganda and, in *Othello*, to Shakespeare's criticism towards normative attitudes regarding gender.

Approach 2: emphasising the differences

Both Owen, in his war poetry, and Shakespeare, in his play *Macbeth*, criticise society through the depiction of characters who are trapped by normative societal values. In one work this entrapment is focussed on the effect of government propaganda, and in the other regarding normative attitudes towards gender. Nevertheless, as a consequence of their different genres and messages, they use contrasting authorial choices, such as soliloquy, setting and imagery, to communicate this.

Approach 3: a simplified approach

Both Shakespeare and Owen portray characters who are, on some level, trapped. This sense of entrapment can be understood as a criticism of society and is portrayed through the use of point of view, setting and symbolism.

Activity 1

Read the following exemplar thesis statements; identify which approach to the thesis has been employed, then annotate them by identifying the four ingredients to a thesis below:

- The names of the works and the authors
- Key terms from question
- Acknowledge the similarities and differences
- Make an argument and share a rich idea

Texts: Sylvia Plath poetry; Normal People, by Sally Rooney

Question: How do authors use relationships to explore themes of identity and self-worth?

Both Sylvia Plath, in her poetry, and Sally Rooney, in Normal People, use relationships as a lens to explore the fragility of identity and self-worth. Plath's confessional style reveals how societal expectations fracture personal identity, while Rooney's realist narrative examines the nuanced interplay of power and vulnerability in human connections. Together, both authors critique the societal forces that shape and constrain self-perception.

Thesis approach:

Question: How do authors explore the impact of societal expectations on personal freedom?

Sylvia Plath and Sally Rooney both examine the oppressive influence of societal expectations on individual freedom. Through Plath's evocative use of metaphor and Rooney's precise character-driven dialogue, the authors reveal how societal norms stifle their protagonists' aspirations and sense of agency.

Thesis approach:

Question: In what ways do writers use setting to reflect the inner lives of their characters?

While Sylvia Plath's poetry and Sally Rooney's Normal People both use setting as a mirror for their characters' inner turmoil, they diverge in their execution. Plath employs fragmented, surreal imagery to create claustrophobic mental landscapes, reflecting the psychological struggles of her speakers. In contrast, Rooney's vivid yet understated descriptions of rural and urban Ireland emphasize the disconnection and alienation her characters experience in the physical world.

Thesis approach:

Activity 2

Choose between the three models above to address the following 3 questions; this should lead to 6 different thesis statements (each question two different types of thesis statement: one which emphasises the similarities; or one which emphasises the differences; or the simplified approach).

Question 1:

Literature brings into the open important issues of the time. How have authors presented "important issues" in works you have studied?



Stage #3: The comparative Thesis Statement
Paper 2

Approach:	While Shakespeare's Othello and Levy's Hot Milk use different authorial choices, they both address the exploitation of power. In the case of Othello, the exploitation focuses on the emotional manipulation and ultimate destruction of the protagonist through the use of soliloquy and dramatic irony. Whereas in HM the exploitation is revealed through internal monologue and imagery, leading to a fundamental fracture of the parent-child relationship.
Approach:	

Question 2: <i>How do two of the works you have studied portray the struggle to be understood?</i>	
Approach:	
Approach:	

Question 3: <i>Discuss how two works you have studied present concepts of good and bad, not as absolute notions, but as a matter of individual perception.</i>	
Approach:	
Approach:	

NB

Thesis statement:

Both works address the theme/concept/topic. However, work X does it in this particular way; and work Y does it in this particular way. They do this through their distinct authorial choices/stylistic features/as a consequence of their different intentions and modes of communication/genre.

