Templates

Extra Scaffolding

For students who need more scaffolding than "although" and "because" alone, fuller templates, especially early in a term, can help students to craft arguable, supportable, complex thesis statements. *They Say, I Say* popularized templates, using them to begin arguments, transition among ideas, and present multiple perspectives.

While students should aim to generate their own ideas, sometimes they just aren't ready, and a template can help them to see what an arguable, supportable, complex thesis with your help.

A Classroom Example

For an essay comparing themes from Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and another text of students' choice, most of my 9th grade students struggled to move past the general "similarities/ differences" thesis: "These two works are similar in some ways and different in others."

While true – since this statement is true of literally every two things in the universe – it is not arguable nor particularly interesting. Even when students could fill in some limited specifics, like "These two works both focus on father-son relationships, but in different ways," they couldn't move past the most obvious articulation of parallels or dissimilarities.

Eventually, I asked the class to use their two chosen works and their chosen theme to fill in this template:

> While _____ and _____ both examine the theme of _____ through (or by doing) _____, they differ because _____.

One student, who started with only a topic and theme idea, wrote, "While *Maus* and the *Percy Jackson* series both examine the theme of imperfect father-son relationships, they differ because Art feels that his father smothers him, but Luke feels that his father has totally ignored him."

This thesis offered him a full structure for the essay. After writing that draft, the student realized that one final step was missing from his work – the significance of these observations – and so he added a second sentence to his thesis: "This leads to Art not wanting to be with his father even though he cares about his father, while Luke gives up on his father completely and wants to destroy him."

While the phrasing could still use some polishing, the content is purposeful, analytical, and fulfills the "arguable, supportable, complex" points we'd been practicing.

How It Works

To create a template, envision a strong thesis for your prompt, remove all the details, and leave the "bones" of the argument. Depending upon your students' levels, you might offer multiple templates, or you might offer templates only to struggling students, aiming to remove them gradually as the semester progresses.