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What is a thesis statement? How does it help the person writing the paper, and what does it tell the readers of the paper?

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**The following opening paragraphs come from real, published essays. These are the types of essays you get to write in college, basically. Way cooler than *Scarlet Letter* essays, right?**

**Underline the sentence you *think* is the paper’s thesis statement and use the margins to briefly explain what the thesis statement says these real-life essays will go on to talk about**

**Pixar Shorts: Handling Tough Emotions**

Alongside their major feature films, Pixar Animation Studios have created a significant selection of short films which are diverse in both subject matter and animation styles. The visual styles of Pixar films are equally expansive, ranging from traditional ways of depicting animals through to new forms of animated photorealism. Despite their brevity, Pixar shorts have a huge emotional wallop as their stories range from how a newly shorn lamb develops resilience to what it feels like to fall in love for the first time.

# Cooking like a Rat: Sensation and Politics in Disney-Pixar's *Ratatouille*

The film *Ratatouille* appeared in 2007 to win acclaim from popular and critical audiences alike. This computer animated film made by the global cultural machine Disney-Pixar explores how sensorial events, such as fine dining and physical comedy, contribute to radical changes to communities and individuals. It is a film that presents representations of sensation and explores how sensation disrupts representation. Importantly, the film, like many Pixar productions, comments on the classical Disney animation tradition, but also participates in contemporary modernization, or the cultural transition to new media and rapidly advancing intelligent technologies. Additionally, *Ratatouille* intersects with political theory that considers the role of sensation and representation in everyday life. Overall, *Ratatouille* contributes to Pixar's commentary on and participation in contemporary modernization by showing how sensation, vulnerability, and creative apparatuses contribute to new modes of existence within a democracy.

# They Want Unfreedom and One-Dimensional Thought? I'll Give Them Unfreedom and One-Dimensional Thought: George Lucas, THX-1138, and the Persistence of Marcusian Social Critique in American Graffiti and the Star Wars Films

Let's say that there was a commercially successful director whose first movie had been moderately successful with critics but a disaster at the box office. Let's further stipulate that this film was a deliberately difficult and noncommercial critique of American Society, a movie remembered decades later by no less an arbiter of commercialized popular culture than Entertainment Weekly as "a head-scratcher of a science-fiction flick" (Nashawaty 94). In light of that director's later success with high school nostalgia and then a decidedly non-head-scratcher variety of science fiction, it would be easy to see the first movie as a rookie idealist's mistake, and that director's later, more commercial and more commercially successful work, as either a sign of someone who has entered reality or as a sign of someone who has sold out.

**Fighting the Battles We Never Could: *The Avengers* and Post-September 11 American Political Identities**

On June 26, 2012, Marvel's *The Avengers* became the third movie in history to earn $600 million dollars at the box office. The film was well received by fans and critics alike and stood at the apex of a series of superhero movies released in the last decade. The appeal of the superhero, as evidenced by this success, has never seemed more powerful than in the years since September 11, a day that floored the likes of Captain America, who wept amidst the rubble with Spider-Man. “Some things are beyond words. Beyond comprehension. Beyond forgiveness” (Straczynski, Romita, and Hanna [2001](http://journals.cambridge.org.erl.lib.byu.edu/action/displayFulltext?type=6&fid=9135961&jid=PSC&volumeId=47&issueId=01&aid=9135960&bodyId=&membershipNumber=&societyETOCSession=&fulltextType=DS&fileId=S1049096513001650#ref006), 2–3). In this atmosphere of uncertainty, comic book writers struggle to deal with the realization that, when America needed its heroes most, they could only stand among the wreckage of the smoldering twin towers with the rest of us and ask “why?”

# Mountain airs, mockingjays and modernity: Songs and their significance in The Hunger Games

Songs play a significant role in the narrative and thematics of Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games (2008), its 2012 film adaptation of the same name, and ancillary media texts released to support the film. One particular diegetic composition, known as 'The Meadow Song,' plays an important role in the novel's and film's audioscapes, serving to evoke the complex cultural associations of the Appalachia region that has transitioned into District 12 in The Hunger Games' dystopian future. Ancillary media texts, particularly the film's lead promotional single, Taylor Swift and The Civil Wars' performance of 'Safe and Sound' (and its accompanying music video), reinforce this connection. Additionally, the melody of 'The Meadow Song' plays a key role in representing the interaction of humans with the bio-engineered woodland arena in which extended combat tournament occurs (particularly through the futuristic conceit of biologically engineered birds that imitate human song). In this manner, songs represent an unusually important thematic element of the early franchise's various media texts, demonstrating how song elements can be closely integrated with plot and thematics, rather than simply serving as peripheral sonic adornments.

# Harry Potter and the measures of personality: Extraverted Gryffindors, agreeable Hufflepuffs, clever Ravenclaws, and manipulative Slytherins

One trait that makes humans unique among animals is our affinity for storytelling ([Gottschall, 2012](http://www.sciencedirect.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/science/article/pii/S0191886915002615#b0060)). Stories permeate modern social life in various forms, including novels, movies, and songs, to name a few. Public figures use story narratives as a powerful persuasion tool and attempt to censor works of fiction for fear of their potential influence ([Green & Brock, 2000](http://www.sciencedirect.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/science/article/pii/S0191886915002615#b0065)). In fact, fiction may be a primary source from which people develop beliefs about their world ([Appel and Richter, 2007](http://www.sciencedirect.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/science/article/pii/S0191886915002615#b0005), [Gerrig and Prentice, 1991](http://www.sciencedirect.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/science/article/pii/S0191886915002615#b0050), [Green and Brock, 2000](http://www.sciencedirect.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/science/article/pii/S0191886915002615#b0065), [Mazzocco et al., 2010](http://www.sciencedirect.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/science/article/pii/S0191886915002615#b0095) and [Prentice and Gerrig, 1999](http://www.sciencedirect.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/science/article/pii/S0191886915002615#b0115)). Despite the prominence of fiction, psychologists have largely overlooked the key role it may play in understanding social psychological processes, such as individual differences in personality traits. For example, fiction may function to simulate and explain the personal and social world, and thus convey how we see and understand it ([Mar & Oatley, 2008](http://www.sciencedirect.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/science/article/pii/S0191886915002615#b0090)). Thus, fictional stories about how the world *appears* can influence our [perceptions](http://www.sciencedirect.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/science/article/pii/S0191886915002615#200015633) of how the world ostensibly *is*. In the case of *Harry Potter*, author J.K. Rowling’s organization of students into school communities or “houses” with particular traits may have influenced the self-views of millions of readers and provided them with fictional communities with which they identify.

# What We Muggles Can Learn about Teaching from Hogwarts

Much has been written about Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Searching the ERIC database for “Harry Potter” yields articles showing that J. K. Rowling has inspired Latin, math, and chemistry teachers, among others. As a biologist, I see Hogwarts classes as most similar to my own field. For my dissertation I wish I could have studied magical creatures like nifflers or hippogriffs instead of skunks. But as a teacher at a liberal arts college, I have to face facts: Hogwarts does not live up to my standards for quality instruction. As [Dickinson (2006)](http://www.tandfonline.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/doi/full/10.1080/00098655.2010.507825#CIT0004) has pointed out, most of what the students learn is discovered on their own, either by working on assignments outside of class or through various adventures. Although the three main protagonists, Harry, Hermione, and Ron, turn out to be highly successful wizards, their success is due more to their amazing real-life experiences than to any direct benefits of a Hogwarts education.