The Three-Sentence Thesis

**Poetry:**

1. Begin with a statement of meaning, using abstract nouns.
   1. ‘In “Title” by Author, present-tense verbal statement about a key abstraction.’
      1. Example: In Ted Hughes’s “To Paint a Water Lily”, the speaker examines the complex facets of nature by illuminating the challenges he faces as an artist in capturing its essence.
2. Then make a specific comment about the conflict or tension in the piece—its complexity.
   1. Example: When he looks upon the scene before him, he sees a vibrant microcosm of constant movement and activity disguised by the placid movement of the water lilies that drift at the surface of the pond.
3. Finish with a statement about the specific techniques (adjective + technique) the author uses to achieve a specific meaning.
   1. Example: The intensity with which the speaker describes this incredible undertaking and the appreciation he feels for the striking complexity of nature is expressed through personification, visual imagery, and slant rhyme.

Put it all together:

In Ted Hughes’s “To Paint a Water Lily”, the speaker examines the complex facets of nature by illuminating the challenges he faces as an artist in capturing its essence. When he looks upon the scene before him, he sees a vibrant microcosm of constant movement and activity disguised by the placid movement of the water lilies that drift at the surface of the pond. The intensity with which the speaker describes this incredible undertaking and the appreciation he feels for the striking complexity of nature is expressed through personification, visual imagery, and slant rhyme.

**Prose:**

Same three steps as above.

Example:

In *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* by Tobias Smollett, Mr. Pickle and Godfrey Guantlet share a tense encounter in which self-control is tested. In this scene, the two men confront their controlled emotions while they attempt to abide by social norms. Through the use of dialogue between the two characters, a tense tone, and an increase in narrative pace, Smollet conveys the complex interplay between emotions and social propriety.

**Open:**

The three-sentence thesis is slightly different here since the focus is on the relationship between subject and meaning instead of between craft/technique and meaning. But as with the above, be sure to have specific, provable statements of meaning.

1. In the first sentence, answer the prompt. Specifically show how the novel or play you chose relates to the question. Include title, author, and explicit reference to the text.
   1. Example: In *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, the character of Charlie is a beacon of quiet wisdom compared to the grandiose lies and emotional turbulence found in the Loman family.
2. In sentence two, explain how the subject of the prompt relates to a key abstract concept at the center of the meaning of the text.
   1. Example: The Lomans have based their American dream on cruel illusions, and Charlie offers both criticism of and compassion toward this dream.
3. The third sentence should link these things to your understanding of THE MEANING OF THE WORK AS A WHOLE. Use the author’s name. What was he/she trying to say?
   1. Example: Through the character of Charlie, Miller reflects on the tragedy of a nation trying to live an unattainable ideal.

Putting it all together:

**Question:** Minor characters often play a significant role in a work’s meaning. Choose a novel or play in which a minor character plays a key role, and show how that character affects the meaning of the work as a whole.

**Thesis:** In *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, the character of Charlie is a beacon of quiet wisdom compared to the grandiose lies and emotional turbulence found in the Loman family. The Lomans have based their American dream on cruel illusions, and Charlie offers both criticism of and compassion toward this dream. Through the character of Charlie, Miller reflects on the tragedy of a nation trying to live an unattainable ideal.