**Guidelines for Writing Your Research Paper**

**Prompt:** Select a TOPIC (subject) from the Theme Vocabulary list and analyze how it is displayed as a THEME in both a written narrative of your choice (novel, short story, etc.) and society (history, current events, etc.).

**What is a theme?** A theme is a main idea or an underlying meaning of a literary work that may be stated directly or indirectly. While it may be ABOUT a topic (poverty, violence, etc.), it is expressed as a MESSAGE or opinion and written in a complete sentence or two.

**Introductory Paragraph:**

Remember that intros are to be like an inverted triangle. Big and broad at the beginning, working toward more specific to bring you to your thesis statement. Maybe it’s about human nature regarding your topic, people in general. Maybe put general examples of what your topic looks like without talking about the specific examples you will give in your body paragraphs. Maybe define the topic, even without using dictionary definitions. After that, perhaps work in relevant information (if there is any) about the author’s life to explain why he or she was prompted to present the topic. Don’t say, “In my opinion” or “In this essay” or “I believe” or “I think.” Leave out anything first person.

The last sentence of this paragraph will be your thesis statement that says something about how your thematic topic is displayed in both literature and society (reflecting the prompt). As one possibility, your thesis could explain what the specific message is in your story and how it compares to real life. You should be sure that you have a long enough intro for a three or more page paper; five or more sentences is best.

**Body Paragraph(s) about Literature:**

It should be about the thematic topic found in a **fictional** piece of literature, like a novel or short story, that you have ideally already read and know, and that you hopefully like well enough to write about it. It can be something we have read in class, in another class, or reading you did outside of class as long as it is not children’s literature. My example is the thematic topic of “poverty” found in *Romeo and Juliet* through the character of the apothecary. My whole paragraph would talk about the theme and that character, NOT SUMMARY of the play. It will not say anything about Romeo and Rosaline, the feud, Mercutio and Tybalt dying, or Romeo’s exile. I might use this quote with a parenthetical citation in that paragraph:

“My poverty, but not my will, consents” (Shakespeare 5.1.78).

Shakespeare is the author’s last name. The quote was found in Act 5 Scene 1 Line 78. Note that the period is at the end of the whole thing. This parenthetical citation leads the reader to find the source on your Works Cited page which would look like this:

Shakespeare, William. “The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet.” *Elements of Literature Third Course.* Eds. Dr.

Kylene Beers and Dr. Lee Odell. Austin: Hotl, Rinehart and Winston, 2008. 901-1024. Print.

Any MLA citation questions can be found on the web, especially Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL).

**Body Paragraph(s) about Society:**

This should be about a non-fiction article. You can use credible newspapers' websites, like *The New York Time*s, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time* magazine, or use EBSCO Host or Gale through our library using the pass codes on the paper the librarian gave you.  The focus of these paragraphs should be an article that shows real people experiencing the thematic topic you chose somewhere in the world at some point in history.  Do not use encyclopedias. You should use in-text (parenthetical) citations. This is part of a researched article from the *Williamsport Sun-Gazette* by the author Savannah Dempsey regarding my sample topic of poverty as shown in society:

***Woman allegedly stole groceries to feed children***

***February 25, 2013***

***By SAVANNAH DEMPSEY Williamsport Sun-Gazette***

***A Trout Run woman faces felony charges after she allegedly was caught stealing groceries from a local store. According to court records, this is her fifth retail theft arrest.***

***Robin Lea Villa, 31, of 2934 Kellyburg Road, has been charged with felony retail theft and one misdemeanor charge for possession of a controlled substance.***

***When asked to explain her actions, she stated that "she currently did not have enough money to feed her children and ... decided to take the food without paying," records state.***

So in my article paragraph I would write about this story and how it relates to poverty. Maybe I would write:

Poverty is a terrible state that leads people to do terrible things, even committing crimes. An example of this is when a New Jersey mother was said to steal food from a grocery store. After getting caught, she believed that her actions were justified because she was stealing food in order to feed her hungry children (Dempsey).

After this paragraph I would find another article about my topic for my third body paragraph with parenthetical citations. Sample: In London, a homeless man committed murder in order to have a better life in prison with food, shelter, and entertainment.

You may want to have multiple paragraphs about connections from a single article to achieve length, as long as your source has enough to it to enable that, and you may want to have more than two outside sources to help achieve length. You may also consider a paragraph or more comparing and contrasting how the theme is shown in the book versus the articles, especially if you hint at this in your thesis.

Remember that you should be getting information for your Works Cited page as you research. Also remember that your paper will be uploaded to TurnItIn.com, so any form of plagiarism will be detected. For all paragraphs, look to make smooth transitions, vary your sentence length and structure (don’t start four of the five sentences with the same word). Check grammar. Don’t use Dead Words. DO NOT SUMMARIZE. Make sure EVERYTHING you wrote in this paper relates to the thematic topic. You must have three FULL pages, so please spill over onto a fourth page (or more). Your last page should be a Works Cited page in MLA format (be sure that the page number is correct!).