English I Writing a Thesis Statement

For your first theme this year, you will write a character analysis about a character who experience change in Red Sky at Morning. Change, thus, is the focus of this theme. Your task will be to analyze this change; analysis involves examination of causes or reasons for the change as well as establishing behavior before and after the change. In subsequent themes later in the year, you will select your own focus.

Follow these steps:

1. Choose a character from Red Sky at Morning. If you are interested in more than one, start by making a rough list of some details you can include in analyzing each one. Which list is longer?

2. After working on a list of details (and the more specific these are, the easier it will be for you to write your outline), write some rough thesis statements. A thesis statement serves the same purpose in a theme that a topic sentence does for a paragraph.

   \[ \text{THESIS} = \text{SUBJECT (character)} \quad + \quad \text{FOCUS (change)} \]

3. Here are some sample thesis statements. See if you can identify the focus in each:

   In Dance Hall of the Dead by Tony Hillerman, Joe Leaphorn’s patience helps him to solve the mystery.
   In April Morning by Howard Fast, Levi Cooper gains respect for his brother Adam because of Adam’s involvement in the battle.
   In Dance Hall of the Dead by Tony Hillerman, George Bowlegs’ curiosity leads to his death.

4. As you create some rough, or working, thesis statements, make sure that it has three characteristics:

   a. It should be potentially interesting to your audience. (I’m the audience; surely you don’t want to bore me!)
   b. It must limit and focus a topic enough to make it manageable.
   c. It must NOT be in the form of a compound sentence, which sets up two points for you to prove. A complex structure is preferable. Look at these two thesis statements:

   Jean Louise Finch is the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee, and she gains maturity because of two men whom her community victimizes.

   What is the most important point about Scout? That point should be the focus. In this thesis, the writer presents two ideas connected by and. Avoid using this kind of structure. If the ideas in both clauses are important, you will still need to choose which one is more important. That idea will be the focus; it will be placed in an independent clause.

   Jean Louise Finch, the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee, gains maturity
because of two men whom her community victimizes.

5. Let’s look at a rough list based on ideas about Scout.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before her change</th>
<th>Reasons for change</th>
<th>Effects of change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>naive</td>
<td>Atticus’ defense of Tom Robinson</td>
<td>Greater compassion for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>innocent</td>
<td>Seeing Tom’s trial with Mayella’s testimony</td>
<td>Better relationship with Jem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brash</td>
<td>Growing a little older</td>
<td>Greater knowledge of human knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rude</td>
<td>Following Atticus’s advice not “to kill a mockingbird”</td>
<td>Better understanding of Boo’s choice to stay in his house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tomboy</td>
<td>Being saved from Bob Ewell by Arthur Radley</td>
<td>Beginning to act more like a lady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fearless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bossy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Now let’s try to write some rough, or working, thesis statements based on these details. Use the space below:

7. Once you have created at least two rough thesis statements, consider how you will set up your theme. In this first one, the components are virtually predetermined by me so that you can learn how to arrange your information. The parts of the outline, which obviously precedes a rough draft, are as follows:

   Title of theme
   
   Purpose
   Thesis statement
   Plan
   Outline

   You will have a separate handout to explain these essential steps.