

Student Activity 1: What Is a Thesis Statement?

A history essay doesn't just list facts. It is a logical argument or clear step-by-step explanation answering a question about the past. The thesis statement is your initial answer to that question. It makes a claim that the rest of your essay must back up with related ideas, quotes, details and explanations of the details.

A thesis isn't just any descriptive statement, it has to make a claim or state a position someone will accept by reading your essay. Your claim should specifically answer the question being posed. If the thesis statement is too broad, you won't be able to back it up or convincingly explain it in a short essay. In a DBQ essay, your thesis statement must also be one you can prove and support using the set of primary sources you have been given.

Your Assignment: This activity will demonstrate what an effective thesis statement looks like, and how it differs from other kinds of statements.

First read the DBQ; then match the four descriptions with the statements about the Haymarket defendants. Be prepared to discuss your choices with the class.

The DBQ: *Describe the Haymarket defendants' beliefs about violence, and explain why those beliefs did or did not justify the great fear many in Chicago felt toward the anarchists during their trial.*

Four statements about the Haymarket defendants:

1. Haymarket Anarchists and Labor Conflict in Chicago in the 1880s.
2. Anarchism in the 1800s was a worldwide movement that often frightened people, especially when they did not understand it.
3. The eight Haymarket anarchists were found guilty of murder (and four of them were executed).
4. The Haymarket defendants often seemed to express positive views about the political uses of violence. Given conditions in Chicago in the late 1800s, this explains why these anarchists were so feared by so many.

Match the statements with these descriptions:

- a. _____ A brief heading on a broad theme. Not a thesis statement at all.
- b. _____ A descriptive statement. But it is not a thesis statement making a claim it needs to prove.
- c. _____ A thesis statement, but one too vague or broad to deal with in a short essay using these sources. Also, it does not clearly address all parts of the DBQ.
- d. _____ A more specific thesis statement, organized so that it addresses each part of the DBQ.