

# Theme Writing Strategy Steps

Step 1: **T**hink

Step 2: **O**rganize it

Step 3: **W**rite a draft

Step 4: **E**valuate it

Step 5: **R**efine it

# **Parts of a Theme**

- **Title**

- **Introduction**

**Introductory Paragraph**

- **Body**

**Detail Paragraphs**

- **Conclusion**

**Concluding Paragraph**

# **Introductory Paragraph**

## **Topic Sentence:**

- Names the theme topic
- Grabs the reader's attention
- Sometimes introduces the Introductory Option

## **Detail Sentences:**

- Include a transition in Lead-off Sentences
- Provide background information about the topic or details about the Introductory Option

## **Thesis Statement:**

- Names the topic
- Names the subtopics
- Shares the main message of the theme
- Leads into the theme in a graceful way

# **Detail Paragraph**

## **Topic/Transition Sentence:**

- Includes a transition/connection
- Names the topic
- Names the subtopic

## **Lead-off Detail Sentences:**

- Include a transition
- Introduce a new detail

## **Follow-up Detail Sentences:**

- Provide more information about the detail based on research

# **Concluding Paragraph**

## **Concluding Transition Sentence:**

- Includes a transition
- Names the topic
- Names or ties together the subtopics
- Sometimes introduces the Concluding Option

## **Detail Sentences:**

- Summarize the subtopics or provide details about the Concluding Option

## **Clincher Sentence:**

- Names the topic
- Provides the main message of the theme
- Gracefully closes the theme

# Note Cards

## Front of the Card

2

Mockingbirds - sing songs of 200  
other birds

## Back of the Card

Pg. 1

Bergin, Michael. "What is a Mockingbird?" *10,000  
Birds*. N.p., April 2006. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.  
<<http://www.10000birds.com/mockingbirds.htm>>

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Ref. 2, pg. 1

# References (MLA Style)

## Book

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960. Print.

## Online Articles

“Mockingbird.” *Wikipedia*, June 2014. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.  
<<http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/mockingbird>>

Zee, Joan. “Northern Mockingbird.” *All about Birds*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Oct. 2008. Web. 20 Sept. 2013.  
<<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/northern-mockingbird>>

# References (APA Style)

## Book

Lee, H. (1960). *To kill a mockingbird*.  
New York: Grand Central  
Publishing.

## Online Articles

Mockingbird. (2014, June). *Wikipedia*.  
Retrieved from [http://www.  
wikipedia.org/wiki/mockingbird](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/mockingbird)

Zee, J. (2008, October). *Northern  
mockingbird*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell  
Lab of Ornithology. Retrieved from  
[http://www.allaboutbirds.org/  
guide/northern-mockingbird](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/northern-mockingbird)



# In-Text Citations (MLA Style)

Harper Lee's reference to mockingbirds begins with the startling title of her book, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). Of course, the reader is immediately prompted to wonder why anyone would want to kill a mockingbird. Mockingbirds are actually harmless, medium-sized birds about 10 inches long (Alderfer 1). Their 17 species can be found in North and South America ("Mockingbird" 1). They were given their name because they "mock" or imitate other birds' songs. Bergin reported that a single mockingbird can sing the songs of as many as 200 other species of birds and even some insects (1). Usually, they repeat another bird's song two or three times before switching to another bird's song (Bergin 1). They can sing a whole string of other birds' songs, and thus they are known for their continuous singing. Interestingly, Harper Lee refers to mockingbirds at several points in her novel to communicate one of the main messages of her work.

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## **Citations for Quotations From Expository Work (MLA Style)**

### **Block Quotation (more than 4 lines of expository text):**

One of the effects of pesticides is that the numbers of birds are decreasing. One reason for this decrease is that fewer birds are hatching. Phillips reported:

In 1999, data collected by the Birdhouse Network showed an unusually high number of unhatched eggs among cavity-nesting birds. At least one egg failed to hatch in more than 20 percent of nests belonging to 7 of the 10 most common cavity-nesting birds, excluding House Sparrows. (1)

### **Quotation in text (less than 4 lines of expository words)**

One of the effects of pesticides is that the numbers of birds are decreasing. One reason for this decrease is that fewer birds are hatching. In 1999, members of The Birdhouse Network carefully counted the number of eggs in nests and then the number that hatched. They found that "At least one egg failed to hatch in more than 20 percent of nests belonging to 7 of the 10 most common cavity-nesting birds, excluding House Sparrows." (Phillips 1)

## **Citations for Quotations From Expository Work (APA Style)**

### **Block Quotation (more than 40 words of expository text):**

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## **Citations for Quotations From Narrative Work (MLA Style)**

### **Block Quotation (more than 4 lines a character says):**

Atticus warns his children that killing mockingbirds is a sin. When Scout asks their neighbor, Miss Maudie, why killing mockingbirds is a sin, Miss Maudie tells Scout the following:

“Your father’s right,” she said. “Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up people’s gardens, they don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.” (Lee 119)

### **Quotation in text (less than 4 lines):**

Later in the novel, Atticus asks Scout whether she understands why they have made the decision not to put Boo Radley on trial. Scout says, “Yes, sir, I understand.... It’d be sort of like shootin’ a mockingbird, wouldn’t it?” (Lee 370)

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### **Quotation in text (less than 40 words):**

Later in the novel, Atticus asks Scout whether she understands why they have made the decision not to put Boo Radley on trial. Scout says, “Yes, sir, I understand.... It’d be sort of like shootin’ a mockingbird, wouldn’t it?” (Lee, 1960, p. 370)

# **Example Signal Words**

**Report**  
**Conclude**  
**State**  
**Reply**  
**Say**  
**Tell**  
**Ask**  
**Warn**  
**Implore**  
**Beg**  
**Hold**  
**Summarize**  
**Explain**  
**Teach**  
**Plead**  
**Wish**  
**Cry**  
**Agree**  
**Grumble**

# Example Use of Signal Words

## Within text:

Frederick reported that, “...”

The researchers concluded that, “...”

They determined that, “....”

## With dialogue:

When Atticus found out, he said, “.....”

Then Jem replied, “...”

Maybelle explained, “...”



# Example

## Introductory Paragraph

### Do No Harm

Harper Lee's reference to mockingbirds begins with the startling title of her book, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee 1960). Of course, the reader is prompted to wonder why anyone would want to kill a mockingbird. Mockingbirds are actually harmless, medium-sized birds about 10 inches long (Alderfer 1). Their 17 species can be found in North and South America (Mockingbird 1). They were given their name because they "mock" or imitate other birds' songs. A single mockingbird can sing the songs of as many as 200 other species of birds and even some insects (Bergin 1). Usually, they repeat another bird's song two or three times before switching to another bird's song (Bergin 1). They can sing a whole string of other birds' songs, and thus they are known for their continuous singing. Interestingly, Harper Lee refers to mockingbirds at several points in her novel about prejudice to communicate one of the main messages of the novel.

# Example

## Detail Paragraph

At the end of the novel, Harper Lee refers once more to the metaphor of the mockingbird. At this point in the novel, Scout and Jem are walking home from the Halloween party together. The night is dark, and they do not have a flashlight. Scout still has on her Halloween costume, and she and Jem cannot see much. Nevertheless, the children hear someone following them. After a few minutes of being followed, they are attacked by someone. Jem is knocked unconscious and his arm is broken. Scout is thrown to the ground in her costume. Suddenly, someone else comes along and saves them by killing the attacker. Scout does not know what happened because she was blinded by her costume, but the sheriff and Atticus reason through what happened. They conclude that Boo Radley, their reclusive neighbor, came out of his house to save the children. They decide not to arrest him and put him on trial for murder although they predict that he would be acquitted for saving the children. Atticus asks Scout whether she understands why they have made that decision. Scout says, "Yes, sir, I understand.... It'd be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it?" (Lee 370).

# Example

## Concluding Paragraph

**In the end then, through the use of the mockingbird metaphor, Harper Lee teaches the lesson that people should not harm innocent creatures who do no harm themselves. Mockingbirds are innocent creatures who only make our lives more beautiful by singing lovely songs. They should not be harmed. People like Tom Robinson, the crippled man in the novel who is innocent of the crime with which he is charged, should not be found guilty and sentenced to death. Likewise, people like Boo Radley, the reclusive man who saved the children from vengeful Bob Ewell who was trying to kill them, should not be put on public trial for murder and paraded around for all the world to see. In the most general sense, Harper Lee used the metaphor of the mockingbird to teach the concept of “Do no harm” but takes it a step further to be “Do no harm to those who do no harm.” The metaphor pushes people to carefully consider the possible innocent nature of those around them who might be criticized or punished.**

# Example Theme

## Do No Harm (MLA)

Harper Lee's reference to mockingbirds begins with the startling title of her book, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee 1960). Of course, the reader is prompted to wonder why anyone would want to kill a mockingbird. Mockingbirds are actually harmless, medium-sized birds about 10 inches long (Alderfer 1). Their 17 species can be found in North and South America (Mockingbird 1). They were given their name because they "mock" or imitate other birds' songs. A single mockingbird can sing the songs of as many as 200 other species of birds and even some insects (Bergin 1). Usually, they repeat another bird's song two or three times before switching to another bird's song (Bergin 1). They can sing a whole string of other birds' songs, and thus they are known for their continuous singing. Interestingly, Harper Lee refers to mockingbirds at several points in her novel about prejudice to communicate one of the main messages of the novel.

By way of background, Lee's novel is set in a fictional town in Alabama. Two children, Scout and Jem, and their father, Atticus, are at the heart of the novel. About a third of the way through the novel, the children receive air rifles as their Christmas gifts from their father. Atticus refuses to teach them how to shoot the rifles. Instead, he tells them to shoot at tin cans or blue jays in the backyard. He warns them that killing mockingbirds is a sin. When Scout asks their neighbor, Miss Maudie, why killing mockingbirds is a sin, Miss Maudie tells Scout the following:

**“Your father’s right,” she said. “Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up people’s gardens, don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird” (Lee 119).**

**Throughout the remainder of the novel, Harper Lee uses mockingbirds to set the tone or mood for a scene. At one point, she uses their singing to lighten the mood in a tense situation. To set the stage, Scout and Jem are walking together toward their school on a dark Halloween night. They are excited about Halloween and the Halloween party planned at their school. Jem starts teasing Scout by talking about haints and other scary things associated with Halloween. Then Jem draws Scout’s attention to the scary house of their reclusive neighbor, Boo Radley. Scout gets a little scared, but as they walk past it, they hear the songs of a mockingbird. Scout describes the singing as follows:**

**High above us in the darkness a solitary mocker poured out his repertoire in blissful unawareness of whose tree he sat in, plunging from the shrill kee, kee of the sunflower bird to the irascible qua-ack of the bluejay, to the sad lament of Poor Will, Poor Will, Poor Will (Lee 342).**

**Thus, the dark mood of the evening has been broken, and the children happily proceed to their party.**

**At the end of the novel, Harper Lee refers once more to the metaphor of the mockingbird. At this point in the novel, Scout and Jem are walking home from the Halloween party together. The night is dark, and they do not have a flashlight. Scout still has her Halloween costume on, and she and Jem cannot see much. Nevertheless, the children hear someone following them. After a few minutes of being followed, they are attacked by someone. Jem**

**is knocked unconscious and his arm is broken. Scout is thrown to the ground in her costume. Suddenly, someone else comes along and saves them by killing the attacker. Scout does not know what happened because she was blinded by her costume, but the sheriff and Atticus reason through what happened. They conclude that Boo Radley, their reclusive neighbor, came out of his house to save the children. They decide not to arrest him and put him on trial for murder although they predict that he would be acquitted for saving the children. Atticus asks Scout whether she understands why they have made that decision. Scout says, "Yes, sir, I understand.... It'd be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it?" (Lee 370)**

**In the end then, through the use of the mockingbird metaphor, Harper Lee teaches the lesson that people should not harm innocent creatures who do no harm themselves. Mockingbirds are innocent creatures who only make our lives more beautiful by singing lovely songs. They should not be harmed. People like Tom Robinson, the crippled man in the novel who is innocent of the crime with which he is charged, should not be found guilty and sentenced to death. Likewise, people like Boo Radley, the reclusive man who saved the children from vengeful Bob Ewell who was trying to kill them, should not be put on public trial for murder and paraded around for all the world to see. In the most general sense, Harper Lee used the metaphor of the mockingbird to teach the concept of "Do no harm" but takes it a step further to be "Do no harm to those who do no harm." The metaphor pushes people to carefully consider the possible innocent nature of those around them who might be criticized or punished.**