

From the start, Francis knew that she had to decide what point she most wanted to make—that her thesis would be. With a little thought, she developed a list of four theses that she could use in her analytical paper:

1. In "A Hanging," George Orwell carefully selects details to persuade readers that capital punishment is wrong.
2. "A Hanging" reveals how thoroughly the British had imposed their laws, customs, and values on colonial Burma.
3. Though "A Hanging" appeals powerfully to the emotions, it does not make a reasoned argument against capital punishment.
4. In "A Hanging," George Orwell employs simile and metaphor, personification, and dialogue to express people's inhumanity to other people.

After considering the merits of each of her four choices, Francis chose the last thesis to use in her paper. She thought she could support this one most strongly and effectively using evidence from Orwell's essay. The following is the final draft of her analytical paper. Her discussion is clear and coherent, and it is firmly based on Orwell's text. She cites many details that capture Orwell's attitude toward the hanging and toward his imperial colleagues, and she has interpreted them so that her readers can plainly see how those details contribute to the total effect of "A Hanging."

The Disgrace of Man

Susan Francis

Thesis: George Orwell's "A Hanging" graphically depicts the execution of a prisoner in a way that expresses a universal tragedy. He artfully employs simile and metaphor, personification, and dialogue to indicate people's inhumanity toward other people regardless of nationality and

Thesis after a good wrap

to prompt readers' sympathy and self-examination.

Orwell uses simile and metaphor to show that the prisoner is treated more like an animal than

like a human being. The cells of the condemned men, "a row of sheds [. . .] quite bare within,"

are "like small animal cages" (220). The warders grip the prisoner "like men handling a fish" (221). Though they refer to the prisoner as "this man" (222) or "our friend" (224), the other characters view him as less than human. Even his cry resounds like the "tolling of a bell" rather than a human "prayer or cry for help" (223), and after he is dead, the superintendent pokes at the body with a stick. These details direct readers' attention to the lack of human concern for the condemned prisoner.

In contrast, Orwell emphasizes the "wrongness of cutting life short" (222) by representing the parts of the prisoner's body as taking on human behavior. He describes how the lock of hair "danced" on the man's scalp, how his feet "printed themselves" on the gravel, and how all his organs were "tolling away" (222) like a team of laborers at some collective project. In personifying these bodily features, Orwell forces readers to confront the prisoner's vitality, his humanity. Readers, in turn, associate each bodily part with themselves; they become highly aware of the fragility of life. As the author focuses on

Point 1: examples of simile and metaphor

Point 2: examples of personification—prisoner's body parts

Parent/teacher call in-text citations in MLA style

Point 1: examples of simile and metaphor

Point 2: examples of personification—prisoner's body parts

Point 1: examples of simile and metaphor

Point 2: examples of personification—prisoner's body parts

Point 1: examples of simile and metaphor

Point 2: examples of personification—prisoner's body parts

Point 1: examples of simile and metaphor

Point 2: examples of personification—prisoner's body parts

Point 1: examples of simile and metaphor

Point 2: examples of personification—prisoner's body parts

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Point 2: examples of personification—prisoner's body parts

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Point 2: examples of personification—prisoner's body parts

how easily these actions can be stopped in any human being "with a sudden snap" (222), readers feel the "wrongness" of the hanging as if their own lives were threatened.

*Personification: example of dog*  
In addition to creating this sense of unmitigable life, Orwell uses the dog as a standard for evaluating the characters' appreciation of human life. The dog loves people--he is "wild with glee to find so many human beings together" (221)--and the person he loves the most is the prisoner, who has been treated as less than human by the jail attendants. When the prisoner starts to pray, the other people are silent, but the dog answers "with a whine" (223). Even after the hanging, the dog runs directly to the gallows to see the prisoner again. Readers are forced to reflect on their own reactions: Which is more shocking, the dog's actions or the observers' cold response?

*Point 3: insensitive dialogue regardless of nationality*  
Finally, Orwell refers to the characters' nationalities to stress that this insensitivity extends to all nationalities and races. The hanging takes place in Burma, in a jail run by a European army doctor and a native of southern India. The warders are also Indians, and the hangman is actually a fellow prisoner. The author calls attention to each of these participants and implies that each one of them might have halted the brutal proceeding. He was there, too, and could have intervened when he suddenly realized

that killing the prisoner would be wrong. Yet the formality of the hanging goes on.

As he reflects on the meaning of suddenly destroying human life, Orwell emphasizes the similarity among all men, regardless of nationality. Before the hanging, they are "seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding the same world," and afterward there would be "one mind less, one world less" (222). Such insights do not affect the other characters, who think of the hanging not as a killing but as a job to be done, a job made unpleasant by those reminders (the incident of the dog, the prisoner's praying) that they are dealing with a human being. Orwell uses dialogue to show how selfish and callous the observers are. Though they have different accents--the superintendent's "For God's sake hurry up" (221), the Draviddian's "All has passed off with the utmost satisfactoriness" (224)--they think and feel the same. Their words, such as "He's all right" (223), show that they are more concerned about their own lives than the one they are destroying.

*Conclusion: universal value of human life*  
Although George Orwell sets his story in Burma, his point is universal; although he deals with capital punishment, he implies other questions about life and death. We are all faced with issues such as capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia, and sometimes we find ourselves directly involved, as Orwell was in Burma. "A Hanging" confronts us with a situation that won't go

*insensitive*  
*insensitivity*  
*but in different words (not mechanically)*

*note: contrastive paragraphs*

*previous paragraph*  
*have fly restates*  
*personification*

*repeating such*



away and urges us to take very seriously the value of human life.

WORKS CITED

Orwell, George. "A Hanging." Models for Writers. Eds. Alfred Rosa and Paul Eschholz. 7th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. 220-224.

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# The Elements of the Essay

one way to create emphasis or a sense of closure in the conclusion is to make a call to action (what people should do)

Main idea: universal tragedy of  
Execution

