

Central Claim & the Larger Idea: The “So What?” in Your Argument

As essential part of writing a successful argumentative paper is to explain to your reader what the significance or importance of your argument is.

Imagine that your reader is skeptical about having to read your paper and may be thinking, “Why is this important for me to read and understand?” or “So what?” Maybe they are thinking, “Okay: the theme in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is escape. So what?” Maybe they are thinking, “Okay: both the aunt in “No Name Woman” and the child in “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” suffer at the expense of society. But what is the significance of this in the story? Why is this important for me to think about?”

Great arguments try to answer the “so what” questions that readers may have in their minds. In contrast, a satisfactory argument may be clear, but it probably doesn’t give the reader a sense of why the argument is important for better understanding a work of literature, an idea or concept, or even a part of our own lives that is explored in the work.

In order to incorporate this “so what” into your argument, ask yourself

- *What are the consequences of X happening in these stories?*
- *What are the results of X happening?*
- *Why is X significant to the story?*
- *Why is X important to think about?*
- *What do we learn when we think about X? How is this important in our lives?*
- *What is the writer trying to show readers by including X?*

You might try to answer some of these questions in one or two concluding paragraphs in your essay, or you might try to incorporate some of this in your central claim.

Below is the evolution of a central claim about “Shopping is Not Creating” and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas.” As you can see, the central claim starts out pretty general, but it becomes more focused and argumentative as I respond to “so what” questions my reader might have.

Both “Shopping is Not Creating” and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” address the theme of escape.

But why is this theme of escape important to think about? How do these stories talk about escape?

Both “Shopping is Not Creating” and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” include characters who want to escape their lives but only at the cost of uncertainty and/or death.

Why is it important to think about this in these two stories? Are the consequences of these escapes exactly the same? Why should I think about these two stories together?

Both “Shopping is Not Creating” and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” include characters who want to escape their lives but end up accomplishing this at the cost of uncertainty and/or death. The difference between these two stories is that while the character in “Shopping is not Creating” risks only her own life and well being in her escape, the characters who walk away in “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” risk the lives of others and the well being of society in their escape.

So what does that matter to me?

Both “Shopping is Not Creating” and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” include characters who want to escape their lives but end up accomplishing this at the cost of uncertainty and/or death. The difference between these two stories is that while the character in “Shopping is not Creating” risks only her own life and well being in her escape, the characters who walk away in “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” risk the lives of others and the well being of society in their escape. LeGuin shows us in “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” how sometimes our desire to escape our society can have negative consequences for others.

Not every successful central claim has to be this long or complex; however, sometimes you can make your central claim more focused and persuasive by trying to respond to some of the “so what” questions your readers might have. Even trying to address one or two of these “so what” questions can help strengthen your central claim.