

English IV CP – DCE - Thesis Statement – The Active Premise

Background: Lajos Egri wrote his seminal book, *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, as a “how-to” book for beginning playwrights. Originally published in 1946, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* is still used today in colleges and universities across the land (UCLA film school included). It is considered the original “bible” on how to write a piece of dramatic work.

Concept: From his early days, Lajos Egri became infatuated with plays and dramatic productions. After spending much time at the theatre, one evening Egri had an epiphany... a Eureka moment. He formulated a simple idea... plays that have an active premise are interesting and insightful. Plays that make simple observations about the human condition are inevitably dull and boring.

Examples of *simple observations*:

It is better to be kind than mean.

Humans like funny people.

Good-looking people on the outside are not always good people on the inside.

Examples of *active premises* (all Egri's):

Othello: Jealousy destroys itself and the object of its love.

Macbeth: Ruthless ambition leads to its own destruction.

Romeo and Juliet: Great Love defies even death.

Dead End: Poverty encourages crime.

Shadows and Substance: Faith conquers pride.

Notice that in each one of these examples, Egri uses an *action verb* in the premise. This moves his premise beyond simple observation. Also notice, there are always two concepts brought together in a *causal relationship* ...

Action Verbs:

| | | | |
|----------------|------------|------------|------------|
| requires | defeats | determines | suggests |
| questions | criticizes | achieves | predicts |
| differentiates | justifies | contrasts | encourages |
| produces | challenges | recommends | |

Observations Verbs: (avoid) knows, understands, believes.

*A successful active premise does not necessarily have to be original or scintillating. It is the execution of the premise (or DCE thesis) that holds the reader spellbound.

Assignment: Write your Character Essay thesis as an active premise. Due _____
