PROMPT 50 (from 2004):

Critic Roland Barthes has said, “Literature is the question minus the answer.” Choose a novel or play and, considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers any answers. Explain how the author’s treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

Here are some student samples of thesis statements. Discuss the extent they addressed all aspects of the prompt.

1. Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* questions a woman’s ability to reach fulfillment as Edna Pontellier struggles against dominating social constraints; Edna’s suicide demonstrates no actual solution.

2. In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin questions the equity of Victorian marriage demonstrated in the social obligation that women must cater to their husband with the only possible solution an abnegation of personal fulfillment through the depressed and ultimately suicidal Edna Pontellier.

3. Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* questions the fulfillment of a woman’s romantic needs in the context of the restrictive Victorian era and demonstrates three rather unsatisfactory options through Edna Pontellier, Mademoiselle Reisz and Adele Ratignolle.

4. In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin questions the equity in Victorian marriage demonstrated in a general, requisite abnegation of personal fulfillment on behalf of wives and Edna Pontellier’s inability to resolve her frustrations shows that Chopin offers no solution.

5. In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin questions the equity in Victorian marriage demonstrated in a general requisite abnegation of personal fulfillment and Edna’s inability to resolve her frustrations presents a call for action rather than a solution.

6. In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin questions restrictions in women’s lives demonstrated through Edna Pontellier’s rejection of important social obligations, which suggests a dire need for change, so women would not need to exercise such drastic and selfish measures.

7. In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier’s inability to attain complete, satisfactory ownership over her life calls into question the burden of traditional marital roles and Edna’s suicide leaves the question unanswered.