

## How to Write a Theme Statement in Three Easy Steps

HOW TO WRITE A THEME STATEMENT

The \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_  
book's genre book's title author

is about \_\_\_\_\_  
state the topic idea (e.g. trust, love, friendship)

and reveals that \_\_\_\_\_  
say something about the human condition

I included the graphic above to show how to compose a theme statement using the three steps given here. I think this handy fill-in-the-blank format to writing a theme is almost fool-proof for kids in middle grades and above.

### ***3 Steps to Write a Theme Statement:***

- 1) Select an important TOPIC the book includes. Topic ideas include: freedom, love, trust, death, forgiveness, and many others. (This topic is often called an abstract concept.)
- 2) Begin the theme statement by listing the book genre, the name of the book, and author. (See graphic above to help you begin the sentence.)
- 3) Now finish the statement from above by adding what the author REVEALS about the topic.

## How to Write a Theme Statement

The theme must be stated in a complete sentence. It cannot include fragments or run-ons, and must be coherent and capable of being read and understood on its own. Wording is extremely important in a theme statement and the writer should be aware of the impact of such qualifying words as all, every, always, most, some, may, sometimes, often, never, etc.

The theme statement is worded as a generalization about life or human nature. It must never refer to specific characters or situations in the story. The generalization is not contradicted by any ideas or details of the story; it accounts for all parts of the story.

The writer should avoid clichés or trite, uninformative sayings such as “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” Likewise to be avoided are morals, which should not be confused with themes. A moral is a lesson which is worded as an easy-to-remember, common saying; “what goes around, comes around.” Clichés and morals are unoriginal and require no serious thought, whereas a theme statement is an original, concise, thoughtful analysis of story meaning and purpose which can be discussed and ultimately verified.

Some sample theme statements are:

From Morley Callahan’s “Two Fishermen”; Selfish motives and the desire for social approval can lead to betrayal of friendship.

Katherine Mansfield’s “The Doll’s House”; Children are relatively innocent and know nothing of class prejudice except what they learn from adults.



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**HOW TO WRITE A GOOD THEMATIC STATEMENT**

Theme is an abstract idea coupled with a comment or observation which addresses:

human motivation

human condition

human ambition

**RULES:**

**AVOID** – moralizing – theme is not moral (*nobody should be should upon*)

**INSTEAD** – observe weight consider

**AVOID** – absolute words – all, everyone, each, none, always, never, etc...

**INSTEAD** – sometimes, often, we, adolescents, frequently, etc...

**AVOID** – specifics of plot, character name and setting

***ABSTRACT WORDS + COMMENT ON THE ACTION OF THE ENTIRE PIECE = THEMATIC STATEMENT***

"The Most Dangerous Game"

Men, when they are courageous and lucky, even in a hostile environment, can overcome the odds against their survival.

Our reason, courage and strength can reach their full potential when challenged by a hostile environment.

The Crucible

Hysteria often takes the place of logic and causes people to behave in an irrational manner, believing things that under normal conditions they would doubt.

In an environment where reputation plays such an important role, the fear of guilt by association becomes particularly pernicious.