

# Theme

Insights into Human Nature

# What Is Theme?

Theme is the central idea or insight revealed by a work of literature.

Theme gives meaning to the story by providing some idea or insight about human life and human nature.

Sometimes a work has several themes.

Themes are often universal. They apply to people everywhere because people all over the world have common desires, needs, and experiences.

# Theme vs. Subject

The subject is what the story is *about*.

The subject of “The Most Dangerous Game” is hunting.

The theme states what the subject *means*.

The theme of “The Most Dangerous Game” is that people who appear to be civilized may really be savage and bloodthirsty.

# Theme vs. Moral

The moral of a story is a rule of conduct or a practical lesson about life.

“Slow and steady wins the race.”

The theme is usually a much more complex and original revelation about life.

Reaching your goals requires determination and sacrifice, but you have to be careful not to neglect your family and friends while working toward your goals.

# Where Is the Theme?

A story's theme is usually not stated directly. All of the elements of the story—plot events, characters, setting, and dialogue—make up the theme.

## Story Elements:

Brenda is athletic and wants her brother to excel in sports.

She is disappointed when her brother shows more interest in music than in sports.

After hearing her brother give a great solo performance in the youth symphony, she decides to support and encourage his musical talents.

## Theme:

Allowing someone to pursue his or her own interests is more rewarding than trying to force someone to enjoy a specific activity.

# Stating a Story's Theme

## **General guidelines for stating a story's theme:**

Step 1: Pay attention to the main character's actions and to the conflict. Ask yourself:

How does the main character change during the story?

What does he or she learn about life as a result of the story's events?

How is the conflict resolved?

# Stating a Story's Theme

## **General guidelines for stating a story's theme:**

Step 2: Use at least one complete sentence to state the theme.

Incorrect: “forgiveness”

Correct: “The theme is that people need to forgive past mistakes in order to move on and be happy.”

# Stating a Story's Theme

## **General guidelines for stating a story's theme:**

Step 3: Express the theme as a generalization about life or human nature. Do not refer to specific characters or events in the work.

Incorrect: "The tie that Paul received from his father was one of his most treasured possessions."

Correct: "Simple, everyday objects can have great value to the people who own them."



# Stating a Story's Theme

## **General guidelines for stating a story's theme:**

Step 4: Remember that there's more than one way to state a story's theme.

Different people may interpret a story differently.  
You may even find several themes in one story.

# What Have You Learned?

Decide whether each statement is true or false.

False —A story's moral and a story's theme are the same thing.

True —The way the main character changes can help you determine theme.

False —Works of literature have only one theme.

False —Themes can be described using one or two words.

**The End**