#### **Theme** Insights into Human Nature



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# 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.

#### **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?

**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."

**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."

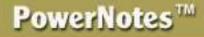
**General guidelines for stating a story's theme:** Step 4:Remember that there's more than one way to state a story's theme.

> 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**



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