

**THEME:** The message the author sends to the reader through a text.

- Is never a word or phrase
- Must be 1-2 sentences in length
- Must apply to people universally

**HOW TO IDENTIFY THEME:**

1. Identify a **BIG IDEA** within a text (marriage, love, responsibility)
2. Ask “What is the author saying about the BIG IDEA?”
3. Go into the text to see where the author addresses the **BIG IDEA**.
4. Use those examples to ask **HOW** the author addresses the **BIG IDEA**.
5. Identify the lesson taught about the **BIG IDEA** through these examples and write it in sentence form.

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**EXAMPLE:**

1. **Big ideas within “Rip Van Winkle” (Romantic characteristics)**
  - Civilization is artificial/ trust nature
  - Value instinct and emotion over intellect
  - Places faith in inner experience and imagination
  - Champions the individual
  - Appreciates history and lessons of the past
  - Appreciates the supernatural
  - Prefers Youthful Innocence
2. **What is the author saying about youthful innocence?** (First, I have to make sure I know what youthful innocence is; I decide that it is about being playful, pure, optimistic, hopeful, and possible naïve)
3. **Examples in the text:** Rip avoids his own work, gets along with children, and makes toys for the children. However, he is not the same when he wakes up from his nap. He learns responsibility and loses his youthful qualities. I would find specific excerpts from the story and write them. Cite them with the page # where they can be found.
4. **Based on the examples I found, what lesson is being taught about youthful innocence?** In Washington Irving’s short story, “Rip Van Winkle,” youthful innocence must eventually fade for a person to mature and show responsibility.