

## ***Universal Themes in Literature***

### *Definition of Theme*

The theme of a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. In order to figure out theme, a reader must ask what view of life a work supports or what insight into life in the real world it reveals.

### *Definition of Universal Theme*

Frequently, a work of fiction implies a few ideas about the nature of all men and women or about the relationship of human beings to each other or to the universe. These are called universal themes.

### *Examples of Universal Themes*

As expressed by authors, themes involve positions on these familiar issues:

- A human being's confrontation with nature
- A human being's lack of humanity
- A rebellious human being's confrontation with a hostile society
- An individual's struggle toward understanding, awareness, and/or spiritual enlightenment
- An individual's conflict between passion and responsibility
- The human glorification of the past/ rejection of the past
- The tension between the ideal and the real
- Conflict between human beings and machines
- The impact of the past on the present
- The inevitability of fate
- The evil of unchecked ambition
- The struggle for equality
- The loss of innocence/disillusionment of adulthood
- The conflict between parents and children
- The making of an artist in a materialistic society
- The clash between civilization and the wilderness
- The clash between appearance and realities
- The pain of love (or what passes for it)
- The perils or rewards of *carpe diem*