

Identifying Theme

Looking for the big idea in literature

A "Theme" is not a "Plot"

- Plot is what happens in a piece of literature
- Theme is the lesson we learn from the events of the plot.
- The theme is a message describing an opinion about life, human nature, or elements of society.
- Some literature is multi-themed: The richer the story, the more themes you'll find
- Good Literature will stay with you and teach you in multiple ways for years to come

Figuring out the theme

- Numerous stories exist in the world (hence, many plots)
- Many less themes exist
- Scholars of literature have identified 12 major themes

Man Struggles Against Nature

- Man is always at battle with human nature
 - Man vs. Man
 - Man vs. Himself
 - *Harry Potter*
- Man also struggles against Nature, as in Mother Nature.
 - Man vs. Nature
 - Man vs. The Unknown
 - *To Build a Fire*
 - *The Perfect Storm*

Man Struggles Against Society

- Mankind is always struggling to determine if societal pressure is best for living.
 - Man vs. Society
- Mankind will leave society for a time in order to return having acquired a lesson for others and himself
 - *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
 - *Lord of the Flies*
 - *The Hunger Games*

Man Struggles to Understand Divinity

- Mankind tries to understand and make peace with God, but satisfaction is elusive and difficult.
 - Man vs. God
 - *Lord of the Rings*
 - *The Odyssey*

Crime Does Not Pay

- A popular theme played out in books throughout time is the concept that honesty is honored and criminals will eventually be caught.
 - *Crime and Punishment*
 - "The Telltale Heart"
 - *Agatha Christie's Murder Mysteries*
 - *Comics (Batman, Superman, etc.)*
-

Overcoming Adversity

- Many books laud characters who accept a tough situation and turn it into triumph. We tend to love these people. They give us hope for our own puny lives.
 - Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*
 - Odysseus in *The Odyssey*
 - Harry Potter in His Seven Book Series
-

Friendship is Dependant on Sacrifice

- This is the idea that you can't have friends if you don't act like a friend.
 - George and Lenny from *Of Mice and Men*
 - Scout, Jem, Boo Radley and Dill from *To Kill a Mockingbird*
 - Romeo and Mercutio from *Romeo and Juliet*
 - Gene and Phineas from *A Separate Peace*
-

The Importance of Family

- Sacrifices for family are honored and explored, as are the family bonds that survive adversity.
 - *To Kill a Mockingbird*
 - *The Scarlet Ibis*
 - *The Odyssey*
 - *Places in the Heart*
-

Yin and Yang

- Just when you think life is finally going to be easy, something bad happens to balance it all out. We sometimes say, "Waiting for the other shoe to drop."
 - *Of Mice and Men*
 - *Grapes of Wrath*
 - *Romeo and Juliet*
-

Love is the Worthiest of Pursuits

- Many writers assert the idea that love conquers all, appealing to the romantic side of us.
 - *Pride and Prejudice*
 - *Cinderella*
 - *Midsummer Night's Dream*
-

Death is Part of the Life Cycle

- Literary works with this theme show how death and life and intricately connected.
 - *Where the Redfern Grows*
 - *Old Yeller*
 - *The Scarlet Ibis*
-

Sacrifices Bring Reward

- Sacrifices and hard work pay off in the end, despite the challenges along the way
 - Luke Skywalker and Anakin Skywalker in *Star Wars*
 - J. Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*
 - Roy Hobbs in *The Natural*
-

Human Beings All Have the Same Needs

- This literature asserts that rich or poor, educated or dumb, all human beings need love and other basic needs met.
 - Montagues and Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*
 - Soc's and the Greasers in S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*
 - Jets and the Sharks in *Westside Story*
-