

Theme

English 10

In addition to plot and character, a short story contains ideas. The main idea or insight about life is the **theme** of the story. Thus, the **theme** of a piece of fiction is its central insight into life (the main idea in the story). Theme, therefore, is an idea revealed by the events of the story; whereas, plot is simply what happens in the story

As a unifying generalization about life or people, theme may be stated directly by the author. Most often, however, the writer may simply tell the story and let the reader discover the theme. When the theme is stated directly, we say that the theme is **explicit**. When the theme must be inferred from the story, we say the theme is **implicit**.

The moral of a story and its theme may be connected. They, however, are not the same. A **moral** is a conclusion drawn from the events of the story; it is a statement about the best way to behave in that situation. Theme is the insight about life in that situation. It does not have to provide a moral lesson for the reader. A good story is not meant to instruct us; it gives us insight into people and how they think and feel, and enlarges our understanding. Literature does not teach; it helps us understand.

To discover the theme of a story, the reader must try to discover the author's central purpose. The **central purpose** is why the author wrote the story.

In Jurassic Park Michael Crichton portrays the dangers of misusing technology. In Finding Nemo, Lisa Ann Marsoli tells the story of a clown fish who faces sharks, seabirds, and sewer systems as he tries to rescue his son from a dentist's fish tank. We find out what happens when the main character refuses to give up. In Lord of the Rings, Tolkien portrays the primal struggle between good and evil expecting the reader to understand that everyone must be active in his/her struggle with evil if good is to win. In The Outsiders, Hinton examines the struggle of outcasts in a society that does not want or know how to deal with them.

Question	What is Crichton's central purpose in <u>Jurassic Park</u> ?
Answer	His main purpose is to examine the dangers of scientists misusing new technology in the name of making money.

Possible Themes

If humans do not watch how they tamper with Nature, the result may be the end of human existence.

or

If science is subjugated only to making money, the result could be disastrous for all humans.



The theme of a fable is its moral. The theme of a parable is its teaching. The theme of a piece of fiction is its view about life and how people behave.

Theme Exists When

1. an author seriously attempts to record life accurately
2. he has introduced theories about life which he then uses to illustrate some aspects of life.

In "The Bridge," Nicolai Chukovski tells the story of a student whose poor marks prevent him from going to college. Instead, he must travel to Siberia to work for his uncle. The theme is simple and obvious. It is not stated directly, but a careful reader will understand the theme at once. This story of the student's experience at a bridge reveals that one experience may change the personality, indeed the entire life, of a person. By the author's description of the main character Kostya at the beginning of the story and by his account of Kostya's heroism later, Chukovski dramatizes his theme. For a year Kostya has done nothing. The thought of leaving home frightens him. Faced with an emergency, however, he is able to act and change his life. The theme, therefore, reveals that growing up is a matter not only of age, but also of experience.

How Does The Reader Detect The Theme of A Piece of Fiction?

1. Start with a clear idea of the characters, situation and plot.
(Ask in what way the main character has changed and what has he learned before the story's end.)
(Examine why the characters acted as they did?)
(Look closely at events and/or characters that seem irrelevant to the main line of action. Why are they included?)
2. Examine closely the central conflict.
(Explore the story's central conflict and its outcome)
3. Examine the story's title.
(Titles often provide significant clues.)
4. Look for literary devices such as symbolism, irony, etc.
5. Determine the author's central purpose in writing the story.

The theme must fit the story; it must give meaning to every part and be suggested by every part.

To Write Theme Statements, One Must Keep the Following Principles In Mind:

1. Theme must be expressed in a complete sentence (with subject and predicate).
"The theme is about love" is not a theme statement.
"Unfulfilled love can cause significant psychological damage" is a theme statement.
2. Theme must be stated as a generalization about life. (In stating theme one must avoid using the names of characters in the story.)
3. Theme can be stated in various ways. There are no magic solutions to detecting theme of a story, only guidelines.
4. Avoid confusing a theme with a moral. Sometimes a theme may be expressed

as a moral principle. But a moral in itself is usually a narrow view of a story.

Thus avoid reducing a theme statement to a cliché or old familiar sayings such as “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

5. There may be more than one theme in a piece of fiction. However, there is only one major theme. Minor themes usually relate to the major theme.

The question you should always keep in mind is

Why did the author write this story?

Terms Related to Theme

theme

explicit

implicit

moral

central purpose

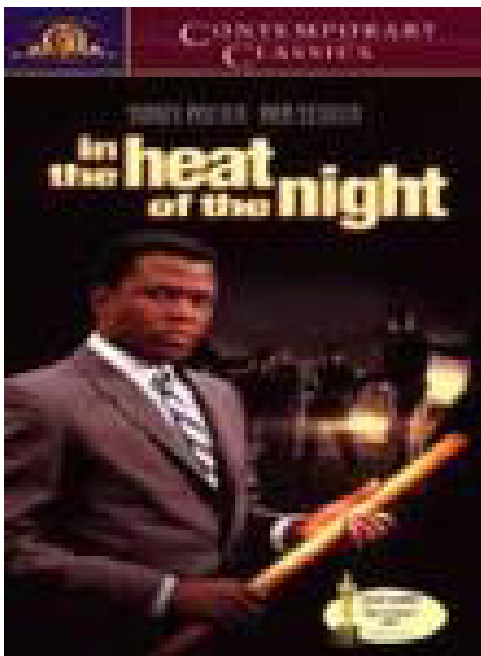
cliche

major theme

minor theme

moral

controlling idea+



The first time around we observe and learn with the characters, recoiling with each shock and stumbling over worthless clues. Subsequently we know the twists and turns of the novel; thus our attention can remain focused on the cast and the forces which place Tibbs in Sparta. With this comes understanding, the joy of seeing men reconsider their entrenched opinions and learn a little humility. Of course Sparta is located in the Deep South and a single episode of co-operation won't reverse decades of racism. The power of In the Heat of the Night lies in a recognition of this fact, that every journey begins with a single stride.