

Theme: What's theme got to do with it?

Theme is the central idea or meaning of a story. It provides a *unifying point* around which the other elements of a story are organized.

Theme works as a message; a **core idea of the story**.

How do you find the theme?

*To produce a mighty book,
you must choose a mighty
theme.*

-Herman Melville

You get it. Theme is a central idea. But how do you *find* it?

There are a few questions you can ask yourself, such as:

- Is the author **making an observation** of a singular person or group of people? Consider the actions of the characters—do they get what you believe they deserve? Why does the author allow (or not allow) that to happen? Does the main character change? Is it for better or for worse? **Why—what does this change suggest?**
- **What symbols appear** throughout the story? What kind of **meaning** could the symbol have? Often times, these symbols will tie into one of the primary themes of the story. The title can be a symbol in itself.
- **Themes can often be described in a few sentences at most.** If you feel that your theme drags like a run-on sentence, you might want to go back to the proverbial drawing board.

Can there be more than one theme?

Yes! And knowing that, don't get frustrated when it's troublesome to find the theme (or if your theme is different than someone else's). Remember, as a reader, you work like a lawyer. Collect evidence for your claims—you can argue for anything if you have the right proof! And remember, often times an author emphasizes one theme more than others— don't let your fears of not finding the 'right' theme throw you off the trail!

Note(!!!)

- Be wary of using clichés (i.e. love conquers all). Good authors are timeless not because they are cliché, but because they are unique—your ideas should be unique too!
- Watch out for identifying an expression presented in one small section of the work as the theme—an idea may be emphasized in one chapter, but that does not necessarily reflect the entire novel.