



Theme: Analyzing Literature

What is Theme?

The theme of a novel is the view it presents about life.

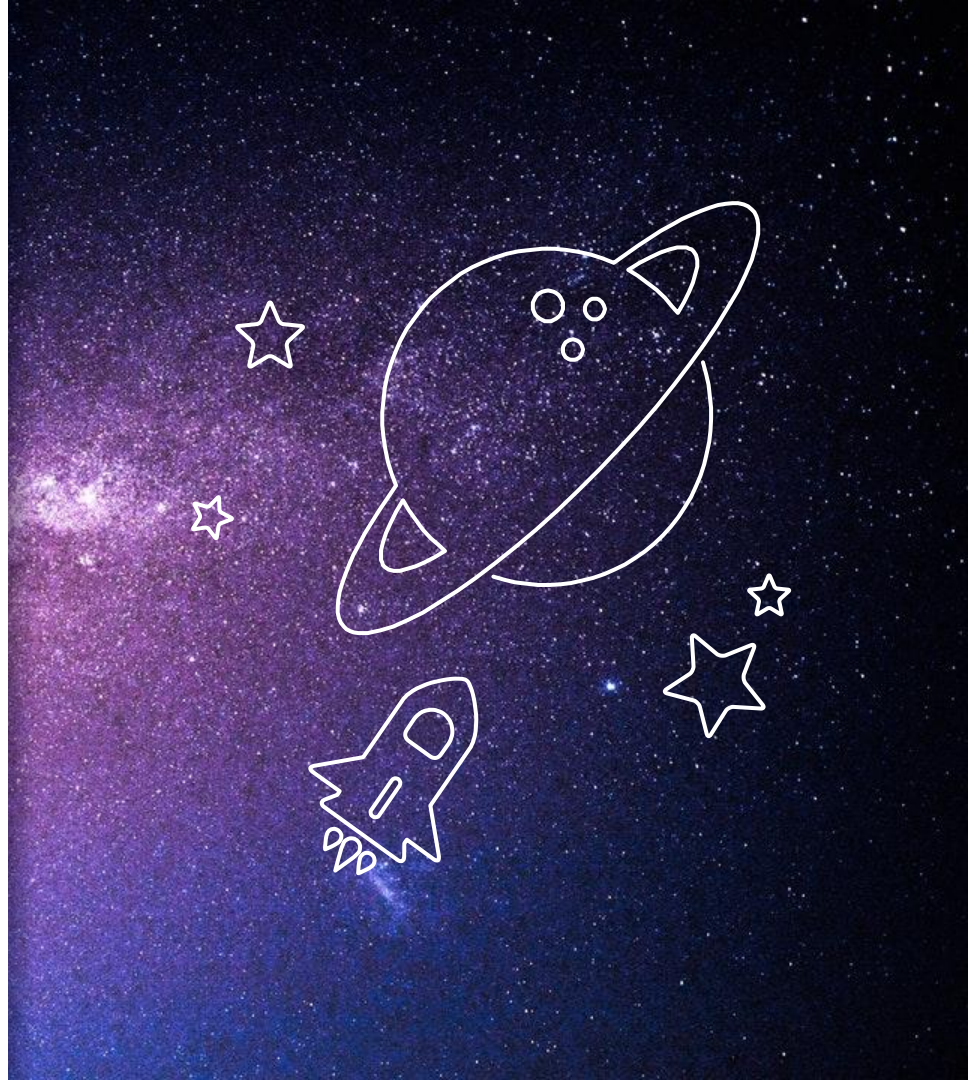
- **The theme is something bigger than the book.**
- **The theme is something which the book presents to hear a perspective and allows us to consider a bigger idea.**

You Decide

The theme is not intended to teach or preach. In fact, theme is NOT presented directly at all.

The reader extracts the theme from the characters, action, and setting that make up the story. Therefore, the theme you find, may differ from how someone else interpreted the book.

Bottom Line: YOU must figure out the theme yourself.



Theme is YOUR connection

The Writer's task (author) is to communicate a common ground with the Reader (you).

As the Reader you find that common ground through noticing similarities between your life and/or life around you and the story.

Although particulars and details of your experience may be different from the story, the general underlying truths behind the story may be just the connection that both you and the writer are seeking.

You are trying to find that connection by analyzing the theme.





There are many ways to view a theme

The theme is the author's underlying meaning or main idea that he is trying to convey. The theme may be the author's thoughts about a topic or view of human nature. The theme may be a universal truth embedded in the story.

What a theme is NOT

Theme is NOT the topic of a story

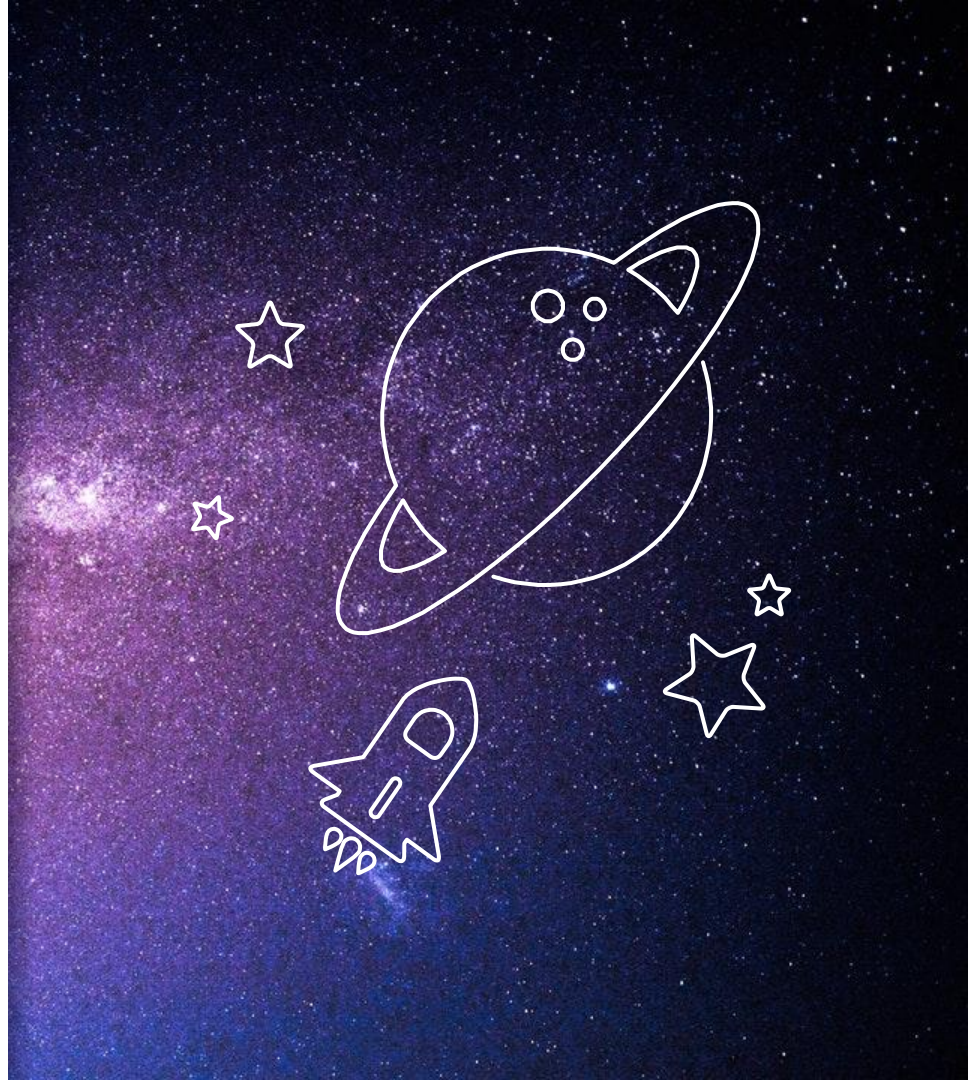
⊗ Love, death, revenge, war, etc are NOT literary themes. They are topics writers tell stories about.

It is NOT a single word.

⊗ Theme explains how the ideas in the text relate to the bigger world.

However...

The point that story makes about the topic is written on (love, death, war, etc) can be a theme. Theme is the main point of a story; the central meaning the story conveys to us.



In other words...

*While a topic can be expressed in a word or phrase, a theme needs a whole sentence to make it's point.

*All of the details in the story should point to and support the theme. If they don't, then it is likely that you are substituting your personal view on the topic for the author's.

*A theme is a larger idea expressed through a story, and so your statement of theme should not center on the characters but on the idea that they and the story convey. Otherwise, it ends up being a summary of the story rather than a statement of theme.

*Remember that the theme is an idea that is expressed through the story but can be applied to the larger world. Complex stories can contain several themes.





Finding the theme

Notice repeating patterns and symbols. Sometimes these lead you to the theme. What allusions are made throughout the story? What are the details and particulars in the story? What greater meaning may they have? Remember that theme, plot, and structure are inseparable, all helping to inform and reflect back on each other. Also, be aware that a theme we determine from a story NEVER completely explains the story. It is simply one of the elements that makes up the whole

How do I know if I got it right?

Right does not really apply here:

Our focus is on VALID interpretations: Your theme is a credible one IF it can be supported by evidence from the text!!!

The details of the story should make sense in terms of your theme. If you have to work too hard to make them fit, then your theme is probably more your own perspective rather than the author's.