**Themes**

**What exactly is a theme?**

The theme is its moral. The theme is its view about life and how people behave. In fiction, the theme is not intended to teach or preach. In fact, it is not presented directly at all. You extract it from characters, action, and setting that make up the story. In other words, you must figure out the theme yourself.

**How do I find the theme?**

Check out the title. Sometimes it tells you a lot about the theme. Notice repeating patterns and symbols (like a red rose usually means love). Sometimes these lead you to the theme. What allusions are made throughout the story? An allusion is an indirect reference to someone or something. 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 make up the whole.

**Common Themes**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Abandonment | Alienations | Ambition | The American Dream | Birth/Childhood |
| Coming of Age | Commercialism | Community | Cruelty | Death & Dying |
| Education | Ethics | Family | Fate | Freedom |
| The Meaning of Freedom | The Search for Freedom | Independence | Faith/Belief | Overcoming Injustice |
| Overcoming Handicaps | Perseverance – Overcoming a Problem | Growing Up | Morality to Guide One’s Actions | Respecting Authority |
| Futility | Gender | Grief | Guilt | Heroism |
| Hope | Identity | Illness | Individual & Society | Innocence & Experience |
| Isolation | Justice | Love | Memory | Nationalism |
| Nature & Environment | Oppression | Parenthood | Pride | Race |
| Regret | Rejection | Religion | Responsibility | Science & Technology |
| Social Class & Social Change | Spirituality | Stages of Life | Success | Suffering |
| Survival | Tradition | Violence | Work | Conflict |
| Redemption | Teamwork | Trust | Ethical Dilemmas | Euthanasia (Mercy Killing) |
| Acceptance | Customs | Money | Choices | Denial |
| Discrimination | Resourcefulness | Nature | Friendship | Belonging |
| Memories | Honesty | Bullies | Activism | Commitment |
| Guilt | Heroes | Good vs. Evil | Humor | Help |
| Immigrants | Adoption | Loss | Loyalty | Leadership |
| Loneliness | Courage | Love | Diversity | Hatred |
| Responsibility | Peer Pressure | Poverty | Pride | Prejudice |
| Safety | Anger | Racism | Peace | Patriotism |
| Discovery | Propaganda | Community & Responsibility | Self-esteem | Violence |
| Tragedy | Caring | Westward Movement | Self Awareness | Character |
| War | Dreams | Challenges | Values | Prairies & Pioneers |
| The Greater Good | Risk Taking | The Power of One | Gratitude | Dedication |
| Sacrifice | Suicide | Playing the Victim |  |  |