

Name: _____

Discovering Theme: What the heck is a Theme?!?

Worksheet Summary: The theme must be declared in a sentence with a subject and a predicate that is a generalization about life, which is the author's central and unifying concept of a story.

Question: *What is a theme?*

Answer: Simply put, a theme is what a book is *about*. However, a theme is not the plot of a book. It is what the author is trying to say about the real world.

Question: *Can a book have more than one theme?*

Answer: Yes and No. By definition, there can only be one theme in a book (there can be many motifs, however, which are similar to themes). However, the theme of a book is *highly* arguable (this makes it ideal for thesis papers) and reasonable people can (and will) argue about "what the book is about."

Question: *How do you identify a Theme?*

Answer: You think about everything that happened in the book, and then think about what lesson the author was trying to teach the world as they described everything that happened in the book, and then finish the statement: this book is about

_____.

Question: *How do you prove Your Theme is Right?*

Answer: You provide evidence from the text and analyze its meaning to prove that your theme is correct. In a class of 26, there might be 26 different themes (even though there technically can only be one!), but each student could be correct if they convincingly argue their case.

Question: *How do you Prove Someone's Theme is Incorrect?*

Answer: You provide evidence from the text that counters the theme. Strong theme essays will mention counter-examples, but then refute them with further analysis and examples.

Discovering Theme Activity

Directions: This lesson is designed to facilitate your understanding of theme in literature. Simply follow the directions and you might have a handle on it by the end!

1. Consider this sentence frame: Romeo and Juliet is about _____.
2. The blank is a declarative sentence that says what the piece is *really* about.
3. No plot summary is allowed in the second blank.

Example: "Romeo and Juliet is a story about a couple who love each other but can't be together.." **Wrong! This is plot summary!**

4. Instead, model this kind of thinking:

Example: "Romeo and Juliet is a story about how grudges and hate destroy families."

5. To come up with such a statement, however, you must first think about all the big ideas (motifs) that are in the story. Fill in the blanks as many times as you have thoughts. Make a master list of potential "theme words":

Examples: Love _____

Fate

Family Feuds

Revenge

Masking

Light vs. Dark

6. Now you'll have to formulate a complex statement about your theme, provide a warrant, and (most difficultly) analyze your theme with evidence from the book.

7. Complex statement examples from the list above:

Examples:

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a story about how love can lead to violence and death.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a story about how individuals stand up against society's standards.

Complete the following: complex statement about *Romeo and Juliet*. *Romeo and Juliet* is about

.....
(This statement will become your claim – your thesis is halfway complete!)

8. After you've done this, you'll need to come up with your warrant. The warrant is the second half of your thesis statement and reveals how the author examines the theme.

Example:

Romeo and Juliet is a story about how love can lead to violence and death(claim), which is examined through *Romeo and Juliet*'s relationship and the rash actions that were taken by them in the name of love.(warrant).

9. Your thesis sentence in parts:

a. Claim: What the book is about (example: *Romeo and Juliet* is about the inevitability of fate).

b. Warrant: How the author reveals the theme (example: which is shown in how the main characters behave towards each other throughout the novel).

c. Put these two statements together in one sentence and you have a thesis statement for your theme essay!

10. Write your complete theme thesis statement below: _____ is about

_____ (claim)

_____ (warrant).

6. Now you'll have to formulate a complex statement about your theme, provide a warrant, and (most difficultly) analyze your theme with evidence from the book.
7. Complex statement examples from the list above:

Examples:

Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter is a story about how **jealousy destroys people**.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter is a story about how **revenge creates unpopular confusion**.

Complete the following: complex statement about Power of One:

Bryce Courtenay's Power of One is about _____
_____.

(This statement will become your claim – your thesis is halfway complete!)

8. After you've done this, you'll need to come up with your warrant. The warrant is the second half of your thesis statement and reveals how the author examines the theme.

Example:

The Scarlet Letter is a story about how jealousy destroys people (**claim**), which is examined through Hester Prynne's interactions with the hypocritical residents of Cambridge (**warrant**).

9. Your thesis sentence in parts:
 - a. **Claim:** What the book is about (*example:* The Scarlet Letter is about the desire for revenge)
 - b. **Warrant:** How the author reveals the theme (*example:* which is shown in how the main characters behave towards each other throughout the novel).
 - c. Put these two statements together in one sentence and you have a thesis statement for your theme essay!

10. Write your complete theme thesis statement below:

Bryce Courtenay's Power of One is about _____ (claim)

_____ (warrant).