

Theme

Definition of Theme

Theme is defined as a main idea or an underlying meaning of a literary work, which may be stated directly or indirectly.

Major and Minor Themes

Major and minor themes are two types of themes that appear in literary works. A major theme is an idea that a writer repeats in his literary work, making it the most significant idea in the work. A minor theme, on the other hand, refers to an idea that appears in a work briefly, giving way to another minor theme. Examples of theme in Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" are matrimony, love, friendship, and affection. The whole [narrative](#) revolves around the major theme of matrimony. Its minor themes are love, friendship, affectation etc.

Difference Between a Theme and a Subject

It is important not to confuse a theme of a literary work with its subject. Subject is a topic that acts as a foundation for a literary work, while a theme is an opinion expressed on the subject. For example, a writer may choose a subject of war for his story, and the theme may be his personal opinion that war is a curse for humanity. Usually, it is up to the readers to explore the theme of a literary work by analyzing characters, plot, and other [literary devices](#).

Presentation of Themes

A writer presents themes in a literary work through several means. A writer may express a theme through the feelings of his main [character](#) about the subject he has chosen to write about. Similarly, themes are presented through thoughts and conversations of different characters. Moreover, the

experiences of the main character in the course of a literary work give us an idea about its theme. Finally, the actions and events taking place in a narrative are consequential in determining its theme.

Short Examples of Theme

When the astronaut landed on the moon, he felt loneliness. Thinking there was no one else, he became a little forlorned, though the view of Earth was stunningly beautiful.

(Theme of lonesomeness)

The space travelers were travelling to the moon, when their spaceship suddenly ran out of fuel. They were all frightened to learn that they wouldn't be able to return to Earth, and could only land on the moon.

(Theme of fear)

The bus was travelling at a great speed when it was stopped by a gang of robbers. The passengers were ordered to get out, leaving their precious belongings in the bus.

(Theme of fear)

Their marriage ceremony was taking place in a grand hotel. All the eminent people of the city were invited, the reason that the celebration was excellent.

(Theme of happiness)

As soon as the clock struck 12 at noon, the jubilations started. It travelled from East to West on the first day of the year.

(Theme of felicitation)

The religious leader was leading a huge congregation of followers, praying with utmost humility.

(Theme of religiosity)

All the family members were dressed in black, with somber faces. They were participating in the funeral ceremony of their deceased relative.

(Theme of gloom)

The cricket match was reaching a highpoint, the fans of both teams screaming their support. It was an excellent game.

(Theme of cheerfulness)

The teacher said that she hoped all of her students would pass with good grades.

(Theme of optimism)

The father of the slowwitted student said he had no false hopes about his son's future.

(Theme of pessimism)

The immigrant looked around to talk to somebody, but could find no one who spoke his language. He felt claustrophobic and desolate.

(Theme of hopelessness)

Only the laborers were working on Labor Day.

(Theme of [irony](#))

The conference was in full swing, with scholars delivering knowledgeable lectures on varying subjects. The [audience](#) enjoyed it immensely.

(Theme of learning)

The politician was delivering a speech on the need for peace between two neighboring states. He said through peace they could achieve what not possible through war.

(Theme of peace)

The general commanded his troops to open fire at the enemy, and to kill each and every soldier of the combatants.

(Theme of war)

Examples of Theme in Literature

Example #1: *Love and Friendship Theme*

Love and friendship are frequently occurring themes in literature. They generate emotional twists and turns in a narrative, and can lead to a variety of endings: happy, sad, or bittersweet. The following are famous literary works with love and friendship themes:

Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte

Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy

Sense and Sensibility by Jane Austen

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Example #2: *War Theme*

The theme of war has been explored in literature since ancient times. literary woks utilizing this theme may either glorify or criticize the idea of war. Most recent literary works portray war as a curse for humanity, due to the suffering it inflicts. Some famous examples include:

Iliad and Odyssey by Homer

War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy

Gone with the Wind by Margaret Mitchell

A Farewell to Arms by Ernest Hemingway

Arms and the Man by Bernard Shaw

Example #3: *Crime and Mystery Themes*

Crime and mystery are utilized in detective novels. Such narratives also include sub-themes, such as “crimes cannot be hidden,” “evil is always punished,” and others. Some well-known crime and mystery theme examples include:

The Murders in the Rue Morgue by Edgar Allan Poe
Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle
Bleak House by Charles Dickens
Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie
Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown

Example #4: *Revenge Theme*

Revenge is another recurrent theme found in many popular literary works. A character comes across certain circumstances that make him aware of his need for revenge. The outcome of his action is often bitter, but sometimes they may end up being satisfied. Examples are:

Hamlet and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare
The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexander Dumas
The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest by Stieg Larsson
A Time to Kill by John Grisham

Example #5: *Annabel Lee* (By Edgar Allan Poe)

“I was a child and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love—
I and my Annabel Lee—
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven
Coveted her and me.”

This short extract, taken from Poe’s poem, depicts the theme of love.

Example #6: *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (By Alfred Tennyson)

“Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
‘Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!’ he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.”

This extract from a poem by Tennyson has two interwoven themes. War is the main theme of the poem, which naturally leads to death — while the theme of death is interwoven with the theme of war.

Function of Theme

Theme is an element of a story that binds together various essential elements of a narrative. It is often a truth that exhibits universality, and stands true for people of all cultures. Theme gives readers better understanding of the main character’s conflicts, experiences, discoveries, and emotions as they are derived from them. Through themes, a writer tries to give his readers an insight into how the world works, or how he or she views human life.

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