



Theme

- ◆ the central idea of a work of literature

Subject

- ◆ the topic of the story
- ◆ is always made up of **abstract** nouns, never concrete nouns
- ◆ stated in 1-2 words:
 - love
 - hate
 - growing up
 - war
 - pride



Theme

- ◆ makes some revelation **about** the subject
- ◆ is always a statement
- ◆ reveals a truth about human behavior

Example:

Impatient love can sometimes lead to tragedy.



When determining a theme:

1. It is usually not stated directly, so you need to look at:
 - ◆ Title
 - ◆ Characters
 - ◆ Plot and conflict
 - ◆ Setting
 - ◆ Important statements
 - ◆ Symbols
2. Determine important **subjects** or **topics** (love, friendship, bitterness, etc.)
Write down several topics, not just one or two.



When determining a theme:

3. Decide what the story suggests is true about the subject or topic based on all the elements of the story. (Sometimes the best themes will be about two or three subjects at once.)
4. Make sure the theme is a complete sentence, and be sure your subject is included in that sentence.



When determining a theme:

5. Avoid:

- ◆ Clichés (overused expressions)
- ◆ commands
- ◆ “you”
- ◆ “should” or “must” (morals)

A theme does not tell us what we should do; it simply suggests what is true about life.



Thinking Critically About Theme

- ◆ Do you agree with the theme?
- ◆ Question the writer's presentation.
- ◆ Is the theme valid or not?
- ◆ Is the writer presenting a truth about life or forcing us to accept a view of life we think is false?
- ◆ Is there a significant theme, or is the work more of a shallow piece of "formula fiction"?