

Theme

What is the message behind this story? What lesson can be learned from the story? What does this story mean? These questions are all asking about a story's *theme*. The term theme can be defined as the underlying meaning of a story. It is the message the writer is trying to convey through the story. Often the theme of a story is a broad message about life. The theme of a story is important because a story's theme is part of the reason why the author wrote the story. The author has a message he wants to share with readers, and he uses his story as a way to get that message across.

Readers sometime have difficulty expressing their ideas of what the theme of a story could be. One reason for this is because understanding a story's theme requires interpretation on the part of a reader. Another reason may be the fact that a story might have more than one message. When trying to determine the theme of a story, it helps to remember that there are many *recurring themes* that can be found in literature—in other words, the same theme can appear in many different stories.

When trying to identify the theme in a story, a reader can begin by examining the story's conflict. A reader can consider the following questions as she tries to determine the author's message:

- What is the problem?
- How does the character confront the problem?
- How does it turn out in the end?
- Why does it turn out this way?
- What lesson is to be learned from the way the character dealt with the problem?

Another thing that a reader might do when trying to identify a story's theme is to think about what the *topic* of the theme might be. Does the story seem to be a message about love, friendship, choices, family, etc.? Once a reader has an idea about the theme's topic, she can then try to determine what the writer seems to be saying about that topic. Sometimes there may be more than one topic. In that case the reader may try to discover how the topics connect.

While identifying the theme in a story may be difficult for a reader, theme is a very important literary element. In order to fully understand and appreciate a writer's story, it is necessary to understand the message that the writer is trying to convey.