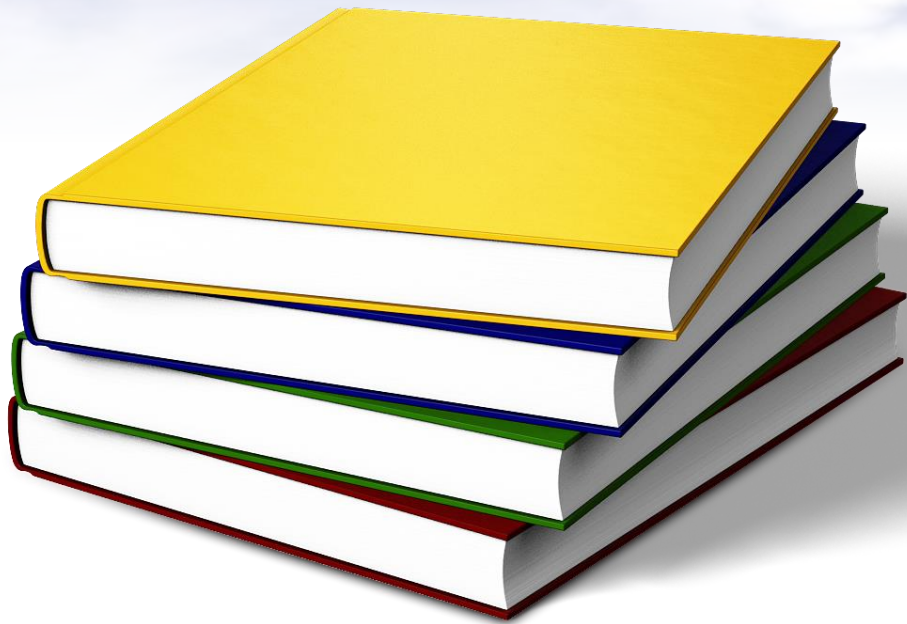


# Finding Themes in Literature



A message from the author...

# The Reader's Job



- Part of your job as a reader is to understand what the author is trying to say.
- Writers seldom come out and tell you, “Hey, Reader! THIS is what I want you to GET from my writing.”
- You, as the reader, must make inferences and draw conclusions about what the author is trying to express.

# HEY! What's the BIG IDEA?!!



- Of a literary work, that is!
- Themes are usually about BIG IDEAS. For example:
  - Freedom
  - Trust
  - Friendship
  - Good vs. Evil
  - And much, much more.



# So, what is theme?



- Theme is the message from the author.
- Themes can be found **everywhere**:
  - Literature
  - Art
  - Movies
- The theme of a **fable** is its **moral**.
- The theme of a **parable** is its **teaching**.
- The theme of a piece of literature is its **view about life and how people behave**.

# THIS is THEME...



- ❑ Theme is the underlying meaning of the story.
- ❑ It is a universal **Truth**.
- ❑ It is a significant **statement** the story is making about **society, human nature** or **the human condition**.

# Get to the POINT!



- Theme is NOT the **TOPIC**.
- Theme IS the **POINT** being made about the **TOPIC**.
- Theme is a **statement** about **LIFE**.
- A **GOOD** theme teaches a **VALUABLE** lesson about life.

# Theme and Idea



- The theme of a literary work is its **underlying central idea** or the **generalization** it communicates **about life**.



# Theme...the meaning of life?



- The theme expresses the **author's opinion** or **raises a question** about human nature of the meaning of human experience.



# Words of the Wise



- At times the author's theme may not confirm or agree with your own beliefs.
- Even then, if skillfully written, the work will still have a theme that illuminates some aspects of true human experience.

# Finding...Common Ground



- The author's task is to communicate on a common ground with the reader.
- Although the particulars of your experience may be different from the details of the story, the general underlying truths behind the story may be just the connection that both you and the writer are seeking.

# You and Theme



- An understanding of theme is dependent upon one's previous experience of life and literature.
- At the same time, theme in literature can enlarge one's understanding of life.

# Be aware:



- The theme never completely explains the story.
- It is only one of the elements that are needed to gain full understanding of the story.
- Literary texts can have more than one theme.

# Finding the Theme



- What is the topic or “BIG IDEA” of the work?
- The topic is...
- The BIG IDEA is...
- What do the characters say or do that relates to the topic?
- The characters say...
- The characters do...
- What do these things tell you that are important to learn about life?
- The text tells me...
- It is important to...



# THEME TOPICS

# Common LITERARY TOPICS – Not THEMES!



- Friendship
- Survival
- Family
- Love & Hate
- Life & Death
- War & Peace
- Motherhood & Fatherhood
- Poverty & Wealth
- Freedom
- Patriotism
- Education
- Homelessness
- Prejudice
- Honesty
- Land
- Laws & Justice

# Characteristically Speaking



- Questions to ask yourself when thinking about theme and characters:
  - How does the character change?
  - What made him/her change?
  - What lessons did the character learn?
  - What are the characters' feelings about what happens in the story?
  - What conflicts do the characters engage in and what happens as a result?



# Common Literary Themes



Poverty



Education

Life



Law

Bravery



- (Themes repeated in many works)

- “Stranger, stop and cast an eye.  
As you are now, so once was I.  
As I am now, so you shall be,  
Prepare for death and follow me.”

(Epitaph in a European monastery)



# 1. The quest for immortality

- Sometimes called “man vs. society”



## **2. The individual's relationship and obligation to society.**



**3. The individual's inward  
journey to understand him or  
herself/identity.**

- Sometimes called “man vs. nature”



## **4. The individual's relationship and obligation to the natural world.**



# 5. How justice and injustice are decided.



## **6. The individual as hero: what it means to be a hero or anti-hero.**



# 7. What it means to be a “survivor.”





## **8. The individual's experience of alienation or despair**



## **9. The artist's relationship and obligation to society.**



# 10. What tomorrow's world holds for us...aKa "The Future"

# 11. LOVE:



- Marriage
- Romance
- Platonic or companionate love
- Altruistic love
- Love of Country
- Admiration
- Possessiveness
- Intense dependency
- Logical-sensible love
- Self-centered love
- Game-Playing
- Unrequited love
- Godly love
- Familial love
- Infatuation
- Physical attraction
- Jealousy

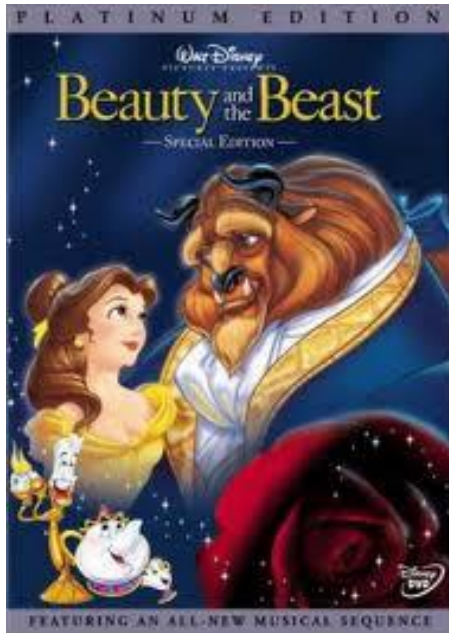


- Sometimes called “man vs. the institution”

## 12. Role of Institutions

# Themes?

What is the theme in the Disney classic, “Beauty and the Beast?”



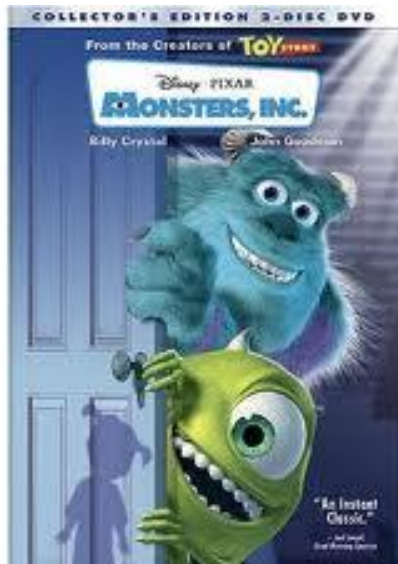
What is the theme in the Disney classic, “Pinocchio?”



# Themes?



What is the theme in Disney's Monsters, Inc.?



What is the theme in the classic movie, "The Wizard of Oz?"

# Theme & Topic Match Up



Courage

Revenge

Jealousy

Dreams

1. Be careful how you treat other people; they may treat you the same.
2. Face your fears and you can defeat them.
3. Do not wish for what others possess. Be happy with what you have.
4. Work for what you want in life and you can achieve any goal.

1. Revenge

2. Courage

3. Jealousy

4. Dreams





# HOW TO WRITE A THEMATIC STATEMENT

# Creating general thematic statements



- *Example: Courage*

- *Courage* *allows people to attempt difficult*

*(Thematic idea)*

*(assertion about the thematic idea)*

*tasks in their lives* *even when the*

*possibility of failure is very high.*

*(qualifying clause: when, because, unless, even, so that, whether, if, etc.)*

# You write one!



- 

---

*(Thematic idea)*

---

*(assertion about the thematic idea)*

---

*(qualifying clause: when, because, unless, even so that, whether, if, etc.)*

# Allusions and thematic statements



- *Example:*

*Allusion: the Garden of Eden*

*Thematic Idea: Temptation*

*The reference to the Garden of Eden suggests that giving in to temptation may result in tragedy even if the action seems to be small and insignificant.*

# You try one!



- *Example:*

*Allusion:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Thematic Idea:* \_\_\_\_\_

- *The reference to \_\_\_\_\_ suggests*  
*that* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Creating thematic statements specific to a literary work.



- Think of a novel, play or short story you know well. Think of the thematic ideas that are present in that piece of literature. Choose a thematic idea word (you may use the resource list) and complete the fill-in-the-blank statement. The assertion in this statement will be directly related to the ideas presented in the work of literature.

# Creating thematic statements specific to a literary work.



- *Example:*
- *Work: Cold Sassy Tree*
- *Thematic idea: death*
  
- ***In **Cold Sassy Tree**, Olive Ann Burns presents the idea that **death is not only an ending but also a chance for a new beginning when those who are still alive take the opportunity to learn from it.*****

# Creating thematic statements specific to a literary work.



- *Work:* \_\_\_\_\_
- *Thematic idea:* \_\_\_\_\_

- *Model: In \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ presents the*  
*(Name of literary work) (Name of author)*

*idea that*

*(assertion about what the literature teaches the reader about the thematic idea)*

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*(qualifying clause: when, because, unless, even so that, whether, if, etc.)*