

Themes in Literature - What Is Theme?

Themes in Literature - What Is Theme?

A **theme in literature** is an overarching idea, or construct that is consistent throughout the piece. Themes in literature are generally universal to any type of literature and center around ideas and concepts that apply to human beings, nature, and life in general. Themes can be found in poetry, fiction, and non-fiction literature and can be broad or specific depending on the preference of the author. A theme in poetry might be as broad as man versus nature. In fiction, it could be as broad as good vs evil or more specific like unrequited love.

What Is the Theme of a Story? - Common Themes

There are many different themes in literature. Some of the themes are very common throughout the world of literature and others are far less common. The following is a list of some common themes found across literary genres. It's important to note that each of these themes tends to be universal and applicable to human beings across all walks of life.

- Love
- Redemption
- Forgiveness
- Coming of age
- Revenge
- Good vs Evil
- Bravery
- Survival

What is the Theme of a Book? - Types of Theme

The **theme of a book** is the underlying message or idea that the author is trying to convey to the reader. There are countless themes that a writer can use when conveying their message, but they generally fall into two distinct categories: Main themes and minor themes.

The **main theme** of a book is the theme that continues to be conveyed throughout the entire work. The main theme is the overall theme of the book and the central message of the entire book.

The **minor theme** is a smaller, less important theme that appears in a certain part of the book and then gives way to another minor theme. Minor themes can often occur in a certain chapter or situation that the characters find themselves in.

Theme Examples

Themes are so important to literature because they connect the reader to the author through the relatability of the message. If the theme of an author's work is redemption, then people who have experienced redemption in their own lives can make a much greater connection to the book. The table below shows a list of themes and examples found in literature.

Theme	Work	Author	Explanation
Love	The Princess Bride	William Goldman	The Princess Bride is a sweeping love story about a peasant boy who falls in love with a girl only to lose her to the Prince of the land. He spends the novel attempting to get her back.
Redemption	Schindler's Ark	Thomas Keneally	Schindler's Ark is the redemption story of a German man named Oskar Schindler who hires as many Jews as he can to work for his company during the Holocaust. His redemption comes from saving over a hundred lives.
Forgiveness	Les Miserables	Victor Hugo	Les Miserables theme of forgiveness is found in almost every character in the book, whose stories intermingle with one another as they seek forgiveness from the ones they've hurt.

Coming of age	The Kite Runner	Khaled Hosseini	The coming of age theme in the Kite Runner follows Amir, who witnesses his servant being brutalized. He grows up to become an author and returns to his home to find his ex-servant.
Revenge	Carrie	Stephen King	Carrie is the story of a teased and mocked high schooler with psychic powers who gets the ultimate revenge against her peers at their senior prom.
Good vs Evil	Harry Potter	J.K Rowling	Harry Potter versus Lord Voldemort is a classic battle of good versus evil and by the end of the series, the characters around Harry all choose sides and battle to the end.
Bravery	Number the Stars	Lewis Lowrey	The theme of bravery and courage is found through this story of a young girl living and surviving in Nazi-occupied Denmark.
Survival	Hatchet	Gary Paulson	Hatchet is about a teenage boy who survives a plane crash in the Canadian wilderness and has to spend months surviving on his own with nothing but a hatchet.

How Does a Writer Develop a Theme?

There can be many different reasons why writers choose to develop a theme in their writing. Themes can stem from the writer's personal experiences, a writer's desire to push a certain message, or simply as a way to make the story more meaningful. Many writers choose to develop a central theme as a way to connect the story to real life, which helps the narrative be more relatable to the modern reader. One of the reasons that many writers choose broader themes is because the themes encompass ideas that transcend generations. Themes, such as good versus evil, are applicable in every iteration of humanity, ensuring that the narrative is relevant over time. One of the reasons that books from past centuries are still read, studied, and enjoyed is because their themes are broad enough to survive the passage of time and the progress of humankind.



Theme vs Moral

As discussed in the previous sections, the theme of a work is the central message or underlying idea of the story. They tend to be broad concepts like love or grief and wrap themselves around the story like a blanket. A **moral** is more of an explicit lesson that the writer expects the reader to learn from reading the book. Morals tend to be much more specific than themes and almost always include characters doing something wrong and then learning their lesson by the end. One of the easiest examples of morals in literature is found at the end of fables. A fable is a very short piece of writing that includes animal characters and writes out the specific moral lesson following the narrative. The most famous example of a moral from a fable is the moral of the Tortoise and the Hare, which states *Slow and steady wins the race*. Below are some examples of morals found in literature.

- Think twice before you jump
- Pride comes before the fall
- Don't judge a person until you walk a mile in their shoes
- Kindness is never wasted
- Idle hands are the Devil's workshop

Theme vs Mood

Most stories elicit certain feelings and emotions in the reader as the story progresses through the narrative. When the writer uses specific words and language to trigger certain emotions in the reader, they are developing mood in a story.

The **mood** in literature is the atmosphere in the narrative that evokes feelings and emotions in the reader by the writer's use

of words and language. The mood should not be confused with the theme of the story, which is the underlying message. A story can have a very serious theme, but convey that theme with a whimsical mood. The mood is something that builds up during the narrative and doesn't have a specific point in time that can be pointed to. The following are examples of mood in stories.

- Whimsical
- Mellow
- Melancholy
- Gloomy
- Cheerful
- Humorous
- Suspenseful



Theme vs Subject

Sometimes there is an assumption that when a story has a concrete subject, then it must be either a non-fiction work or a partial work of fiction. But the **subject** in literature is actually the main topic of the narrative that acts as the root or foundation of the piece. The big difference between theme and subject is that the theme is the writer's opinion, while the subject is more concrete and un-opinionated. The novel *Jurassic Park* by Michael Crichton is a work of fiction about a corporation that figures out how to clone dinosaurs and builds a theme park on an island to showcase the dinosaurs. The subject of the novel is genetics and nature, but the theme is the dangers of manipulating nature and trying to play God. Readers of the novel could agree that trying to clone dinosaurs is a bad and dangerous idea, while other readers might want to see it happen. None of the readers, however, could argue that the subject is not about genetics and nature. The theme and the subject often go hand in hand, but the theme is more opinion and the subject is more straightforward and without the need for interpretation.

Lesson Summary

The **theme** in literature is the overarching idea, or construct that is consistent throughout the piece. There are **major themes**, which occur throughout the entire work, or **minor themes** which are in certain parts of the work and often end where a new minor theme picks up. Writers often develop themes based on personal experiences, or personal opinions that they'd like to convey to their readers. Some examples of themes are:

- Love
- Redemption
- Forgiveness
- Coming of age
- Revenge
- Good vs Evil
- Bravery
- Survival

Theme can often be misinterpreted as other tools of literature such as morals, mood, or subject.

- Morals are specific lessons that the writer wants the reader to learn by the end of the piece. An example would be: *Don't judge a book by its cover*.
- Mood is the general atmosphere of the book conveyed through words and descriptions. An example would be a cheerful mood found throughout the novel *Mary Poppins* by D.L Travers.
- Subject is the foundation on which the story is centered and is not opinion-based like the theme. An example is the subject of the novel *The DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown is religion.



What is a theme in literature?

- A) A detailed character analysis
- B) The underlying message or idea in a story
- C) The chronological order of events
- D) The setting of the story

Which of the following is an example of a common theme in literature?

- A) Specific historical events
- B) Complex scientific theories
- C) Love
- D) Detailed geographical descriptions

What distinguishes a main theme from a minor theme in a book?

- A) A main theme is more complex
- B) A main theme appears only in the beginning
- C) A main theme continues throughout the entire work
- D) A main theme is always about the protagonist

Which book is an example of the theme of redemption?

- A) The Princess Bride
- B) Schindler's Ark
- C) Hatchet
- D) Harry Potter

What is the theme of 'The Kite Runner' by Khaled Hosseini?

- A) Revenge
- B) Coming of age
- C) Survival
- D) Bravery

Which theme is explored in 'Harry Potter' by J.K. Rowling?

- A) Good vs Evil
- B) Forgiveness
- C) Love
- D) Survival

What is the difference between a theme and a moral in literature?

- A) A theme is a detailed character sketch, while a moral is a lesson
- B) A theme is an underlying message, while a moral is a specific lesson
- C) A theme and a moral are the same
- D) A theme is about the setting, while a moral is about the plot

Which of the following is an example of mood in literature?

- A) Whimsical
- B) Love
- C) Good vs Evil
- D) Coming of age

What is the subject of 'Jurassic Park' by Michael Crichton?

- A) Genetics and nature
- B) Dinosaurs
- C) Theme parks
- D) Adventure

'Les Miserables' by Victor Hugo primarily explores which theme?

- A) Revenge
- B) Forgiveness
- C) Survival
- D) Bravery

What is the theme of 'Carrie' by Stephen King?

- A) Coming of age
- B) Love

- C) Revenge
- D) Redemption

In literature, what does the theme 'man versus nature' typically explore?

- A) The conflict between different cultures
- B) The struggle of a character against natural forces
- C) The evolution of technology
- D) The history of human civilization

natural elements.

Which theme is central to 'Number the Stars' by Lois Lowry?

- A) Bravery
- B) Love
- C) Redemption
- D) Coming of age

How does a writer typically develop a theme in their writing?

- A) By using complex language
- B) Based on personal experiences or messages they want to convey
- C) Through detailed historical references
- D) By focusing solely on the protagonist

What is the theme of 'Hatchet' by Gary Paulson?

- A) Survival
- B) Revenge
- C) Love
- D) Bravery

Which of the following is a moral from a fable?

- A) Slow and steady wins the race
- B) Love conquers all
- C) Good always defeats evil
- D) Bravery is the truest form of courage

What is the difference between theme and subject in literature?

- A) Theme is opinion-based, while subject is more concrete
- B) Theme and subject are interchangeable terms
- C) Theme is about the plot, while subject is about the characters
- D) Theme is always fictional, while subject is factual

What is a theme in literature?

- A) A detailed character analysis
- B) The underlying message or idea in a story
- C) The chronological order of events
- D) The setting of the story

Answer: B) The underlying message or idea in a story

Explanation: A theme is the central idea or message that is consistent throughout a literary piece.

Which of the following is an example of a common theme in literature?

- A) Specific historical events
- B) Complex scientific theories
- C) Love
- D) Detailed geographical descriptions

Answer: C) Love

Explanation: Love is a universal and common theme found across various literary genres.

What distinguishes a main theme from a minor theme in a book?

- A) A main theme is more complex
- B) A main theme appears only in the beginning
- C) A main theme continues throughout the entire work
- D) A main theme is always about the protagonist

Answer: C) A main theme continues throughout the entire work

Explanation: The main theme is the central message of the entire book, whereas minor themes may appear in certain parts.

Which book is an example of the theme of redemption?

- A) The Princess Bride
- B) Schindler's Ark
- C) Hatchet
- D) Harry Potter

Answer: B) Schindler's Ark

Explanation: Schindler's Ark is about Oskar Schindler's redemption through saving lives during the Holocaust.

What is the theme of 'The Kite Runner' by Khaled Hosseini?

- A) Revenge
- B) Coming of age
- C) Survival
- D) Bravery

Answer: B) Coming of age

Explanation: The Kite Runner follows Amir's journey from childhood to adulthood.

Which theme is explored in 'Harry Potter' by J.K. Rowling?

- A) Good vs Evil
- B) Forgiveness
- C) Love
- D) Survival

Answer: A) Good vs Evil

Explanation: The series revolves around the battle between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort.

What is the difference between a theme and a moral in literature?

- A) A theme is a detailed character sketch, while a moral is a lesson
- B) A theme is an underlying message, while a moral is a specific lesson
- C) A theme and a moral are the same
- D) A theme is about the setting, while a moral is about the plot

Answer: B) A theme is an underlying message, while a moral is a specific lesson

Explanation: Themes are broad concepts, whereas morals are explicit lessons from the story.

Which of the following is an example of mood in literature?

- A) Whimsical
- B) Love
- C) Good vs Evil
- D) Coming of age

Answer: A) Whimsical

Explanation: Mood refers to the atmosphere in a narrative, such as whimsical, gloomy, or cheerful.

What is the subject of 'Jurassic Park' by Michael Crichton?

- A) Genetics and nature
- B) Dinosaurs
- C) Theme parks
- D) Adventure

Answer: A) Genetics and nature

Explanation: The novel's subject is genetics and nature, focusing on the cloning of dinosaurs.

'Les Miserables' by Victor Hugo primarily explores which theme?

- A) Revenge
- B) Forgiveness
- C) Survival
- D) Bravery

Answer: B) Forgiveness

Explanation: The theme of forgiveness is prevalent in the intermingling stories of the characters.

What is the theme of 'Carrie' by Stephen King?

- A) Coming of age
- B) Love

- C) Revenge
- D) Redemption

Answer: C) Revenge

Explanation: Carrie is about a high schooler who uses her psychic powers for revenge.

In literature, what does the theme 'man versus nature' typically explore?

- A) The conflict between different cultures
- B) The struggle of a character against natural forces
- C) The evolution of technology
- D) The history of human civilization

Answer: B) The struggle of a character against natural forces

Explanation: 'Man versus nature' is a theme that explores the challenges characters face against natural elements.

Which theme is central to 'Number the Stars' by Lois Lowry?

- A) Bravery
- B) Love
- C) Redemption
- D) Coming of age

Answer: A) Bravery

Explanation: The story showcases bravery and courage during Nazi-occupied Denmark.

How does a writer typically develop a theme in their writing?

- A) By using complex language
- B) Based on personal experiences or messages they want to convey
- C) Through detailed historical references
- D) By focusing solely on the protagonist

Answer: B) Based on personal experiences or messages they want to convey

Explanation: Writers often use personal experiences or specific messages to develop themes.

What is the theme of 'Hatchet' by Gary Paulson?

- A) Survival
- B) Revenge
- C) Love
- D) Bravery

Answer: A) Survival

Explanation: Hatchet is about a boy's struggle to survive in the wilderness.

Which of the following is a moral from a fable?

- A) Slow and steady wins the race
- B) Love conquers all
- C) Good always defeats evil
- D) Bravery is the truest form of courage

Answer: A) Slow and steady wins the race

Explanation: This moral is from the fable of the Tortoise and the Hare.

What is the difference between theme and subject in literature?

- A) Theme is opinion-based, while subject is more concrete
- B) Theme and subject are interchangeable terms
- C) Theme is about the plot, while subject is about the characters
- D) Theme is always fictional, while subject is factual

Answer: A) Theme is opinion-based, while subject is more concrete

Explanation: Theme is the writer's opinion or message, whereas the subject is the main topic of the narrative.