

# THEME & MORAL

Theme refers to the main idea or underlying meaning of a literary work. It is the basic idea of the story; what the author is really trying to say; what the author wants the reader to get out of the written work.

A theme may be stated or implied. Theme differs from the subject or topic of a literary work in that it involves a statement or opinion about the topic. Themes may be major or minor.

A **major** theme is an idea the author returns to time and again. It becomes one of the most important ideas in the story.

**Minor** themes are ideas that may appear from once or twice.

It is important to recognize the difference between the theme of a literary work and the subject of a literary work. The subject is the topic on which an author has chosen to write. The theme, however, makes some statement about or expresses some opinion on that topic.

For example, the subject of a story might be war while the theme might be the idea that war is useless; a story about children playing on a jungle gym could really be referring to how politicians get along; a story about a turtle climbing a ditch could really be about the struggles adults deal with throughout their lives and the need to be persistent in working toward what you want out of life.

## Four ways in which an author can express themes are as follows:

1. The **actions or events** in the story are used to suggest theme. People naturally express ideas and feelings through their actions. One thing authors think about is what an action will "say". In other words, how will the action express an idea or theme?
2. Themes are presented in **thoughts and conversations**. Authors put words in their character's mouths only for good reasons. One of these is to develop a story's themes. The things a person says are much on their mind. Look for thoughts that are repeated throughout the story.
3. Themes are expressed and emphasized by the way the author makes us feel. By sharing **feelings of the main character** you also share the ideas that go through his mind.
4. Themes are suggested through the characters. The main character usually illustrates the most important theme of the story. A good way to get at this theme is to ask yourself the question, **what does the main character learn** in the course of the story?

Every story has a **theme**, but not every story has a **moral**.

The **moral** of a story (or poem, play, film, etc.) is the lesson or principle contained in or taught by the story. In other words, it is a concisely expressed precept or general truth.

- A **moral** is a piece of practical advice that can be gained from the novel or story to apply to our own lives.
- A **theme** is more complex than a **moral** and may have no direct advice or philosophical value that the reader can apply.