**THEME**

Three questions to elicit a work’s theme are:

1. What is the subject, or what is the work about?
2. Then what does the work say about the subject, or what is the theme?
3. And finally, in what direct an indirect ways does the work communicate the theme(s)?

One strategy for discovering a work’s theme(s) is to apply frequently asked questions about areas of human experience. Some are:

**Human nature:**

What image of humankind emerges from the work? Are people, for example, generally good? Deeply flawed?

**The nature of society:**

Does the author portray a particular society or social scheme as life-enhancing or life-destroying? Are characters we care about in conflict with their society? If so, in what ways do they conflict with that society? Do these characters want to escape from it? What causes and perpetuates this conflict? If the society is flawed, how it is flawed?

**Ethics:**

What are the moral conflicts in the work? Are they clear cut or ambiguous? That is, is it clear to us what is right and what exactly is wrong? When moral conflicts are ambiguous in a work, right often opposes right, not wrong. Don’t’ forget to examine these issues from the perspective of every character. What rights are in opposition to one another? If right opposes wrong, does right win in the end? To what extent are characters to blame for their actions?

To write a theme, word it as: “People should\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” OR “People should not\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”. It is a UNIVERSAL idea, not text specific.

**To analyze for theme:**

1. List the subject or subjects of the work. For each subject, see if you can state a theme in a complete sentence. Put a check next to the subjects that seem most important.
2. Explain how the **title, subtitle, epigraph, chapter titles, and names of** **characters** may be related to theme.
3. Describe the work’s depiction of **human behavior**.
4. Describe the work’s depiction of **society**. Explain the representation of social ills and how they might be corrected or addressed.
5. List the moral issues raised by the work.
6. Mark statements by the author or characters that seem to state or imply theme.
7. Does the theme of the work reinforce values you hold, or does it to some degree challenge them?