

Universal Themes in Literature

Definition of Theme

The theme of a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. In order to figure out theme, a reader must ask what view of life a work supports or what insight into life in the real world it reveals.

Definition of Universal Theme

Frequently, a work of fiction implies a few ideas about the nature of all men and women or about the relationship of human beings to each other or to the universe. These are called universal themes.

Examples of Universal Themes

As expressed by authors, themes involve positions on these familiar issues:

- A human being's confrontation with nature
- A human being's lack of humanity
- A rebellious human being's confrontation with a hostile society
- An individual's struggle toward understanding, awareness, and/or spiritual enlightenment
- An individual's conflict between passion and responsibility
- The human glorification of the past/ rejection of the past
- The tension between the ideal and the real
- Conflict between human beings and machines
- The impact of the past on the present
- The inevitability of fate
- The evil of unchecked ambition
- The struggle for equality
- The loss of innocence/disillusionment of adulthood
- The conflict between parents and children
- The making of an artist in a materialistic society
- The clash between civilization and the wilderness
- The clash between appearance and realities
- The pain of love (or what passes for it)
- The perils or rewards of *carpe diem*