

Crafting a Theme Statement

Looking for Big Ideas Within Text

WHAT IS A THEME? THE MESSAGE (get it?)

A theme is defined as an underlying meaning of a literary work, which may be stated directly or indirectly. This is the message or commentary about society or humanity the author is getting across, often by looking at the protagonist's journey as well as the thoughts, emotions, and dialogue of all the characters along with the action and events.

MORE TO CONSIDER WHEN CRAFTING A THEME

- In literary analysis, the theme is a statement, not a word.
- Themes are universal and timeless, meaning that should apply to humanity all over the world and throughout time.
- Themes are not specific to the story, so you do not include any specific story details in the statement; rather, make the theme statement a general comment about the human experience.

HOW DO WE DETERMINE THEME?

Start with abstract ideas that stand out as being explored within the text--love, hate, courage, brotherhood, friendship; then, ask yourself, what is the text saying about that idea.

WHAT IS A THESIS? ARE THEME AND THESIS THE SAME THING?

Every paper you write should have a main point, a main idea, or central message. The argument(s) you make in your paper should reflect this main idea. The sentence that captures your position on this main idea is what we call a thesis statement.

A thesis is the controlling idea in an essay. It is found as the last sentence in the introductory paragraph and organizes the writing in one concise statement. Be as clear and as specific as possible; avoid vague words. Indicate the point of your paper but avoid sentence structures like, "The point of my paper is..."

How is a thesis confused with a theme? They both start with "th". Yes, that's it. It could also be that a theme CAN BE a thesis statement if that is the purpose of the essay--to prove a theme.

ACTIVITY TO DETERMINE THEME

Title: _____ Author _____

1. This work is about (abstract nouns only). Include at least one universal theme word.

a) _____ b) _____ c) _____

2. For each noun, write a sentence (using the noun) that you think the author wants to say to readers. See considerations above to frame your ideas. Consider linking two universal themes into one statement.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

3. Choose one sentence from above. Paraphrase evidence from the text that illustrates this theme by listing three, separate characters, setting details, motifs, or situations; then, cite the specific situations or results from each that justify the theme statement.

Statement: _____

Evidence #1 _____

• .

•

• .

Evidence #2 _____

- .
- .
- .

Evidence #3 _____

- .
- .
- .

LOOKING AHEAD

You are outlining your points for a thematic essay. To start the essay, you will need a general statement about society or the environment to which your theme points. Try writing a statement(s) below to lead your readers into the topic, followed by a short summary with the author and title.

Lead:

Brief summary with author/title:

Thesis:

SAMPLE

Title: *Fahrenheit 451*

Author: **Ray Bradbury**

1. This work is about (abstract nouns only). Include at least one universal theme word.

a) **knowledge**

b) **technology**

c) **systems**

2. For each noun, write a sentence (using the noun) that you think the author wants to say to readers. See the considerations above to frame your ideas.

a) **Knowledge, rather than ignorance, is the path to a fulfilled life.**

b) **Technology can have the potential to be destructive to society.**

c) **Systems that create order are often embraced to the detriment of free will.**

3. Choose one sentence from above. Paraphrase evidence from the text that illustrates this theme by listing three, separate characters, setting details, motifs, or situations; then, cite the specific situations or results from each that justify the theme statement.

Statement: **Ray Bradbury's novel Fahrenheit 451 is saying that knowledge, rather than ignorance, is the path to a fulfilled life.**

Evidence #1: **Montag's transformation from fireman to rebel**

- **Befriends Clarisse and see new life**
- **Forces Mildred's friends to read poetry--true emotion.**
- **...**

Evidence #2 **Juxtaposition of Mildred and Clarisse**

- **.Mildred is obsessed with television, takes drugs, is suicidal, and scared of everything**
- **.Clarisse is full of life, pursues knowledge**
- **...**

LOOKING AHEAD: General statement to LEAD readers into the topic:

People often look at ways to make life easier, less complicated, less stressful. Alcohol, drugs, countless hours in front of a screen, but what does this fall into mindless passivity do to society? Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* explores what happens to a society where knowledge is not valued and firefighters burn books, rather than reading them. Bradbury's purpose is to demonstrate that knowledge, rather than ignorance, is a path to a fulfilled life.

