

Honors Literature and Short Stories

Week 2

Theme

The theme is not usually an obvious moral or message. It is defined as: “central idea, underlying meaning.” You may not see the theme of a story right away, but once you understand what you are looking for, the theme may jump out at you or suddenly become clear.

Subject vs. Theme

The subject is the topic, what the story is about. Make sure you do not confuse this with theme. Theme is a direct or implied statement that the story makes **about** the subject; the idea or ideas that we gain from thinking about what we read. So, if you read a book and someone asks you what it is about, you can tell them the subject of the book –usually in a word or two. Subjects of books might be: love, childhood, death, growing up. Then, you can determine what is being said about the subject. In a very simple example, a story could be about two girls with family problems who grow up together. The subject of the story is what I just said. What idea do we gain when we think about this subject? We gain the idea that friendship can be more powerful than family tragedy . This, then, is the theme.

- The theme should be stated as a complete sentence.
- The theme should be stated in general rather than specific terms. It is a generalization. **You will not use names of characters or specific situation from the plot in your theme statement.**
- The theme usually states some insight into the human condition. It should be about mankind in general – beliefs, values, feelings, interpretations and misinterpretations.
 - Focus on how the imagery, setting, character, tone, and style contribute to the main idea of the story.
 - Since the theme reflects the author’s views of life, he will usually emphasize certain values.
 - What is meaningful in the author’s thoughts and perceptions?
 - Sometimes the title of the story gives a clue to the theme of the story.
 - Think about the character in the story – does he change in any way? Does he arrive at a new understanding or realization?
- More than one theme may be expressed in a piece of literature. Each person may gain a different insight from the same piece of literature, however the goal is to search for insight into the author’s message.

Some words that may be helpful to be used in your statement of the theme:

Illustrates	represents	depicts	paints a picture	portrays
Presents	exemplifies	represents	identifies	characterizes
Features	typifies			

Symbolism

Symbolism is something concrete that stands for or hints at more than itself. Often it is an inanimate object, animal, colors, names, lines from poems or songs, or repeated phrase. Sometimes the symbol is quite obvious, as in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The “mockingbird” is the symbol; your job is to determine for what it is a symbol. This may require looking up mockingbird in order to find out what traits it has that could be related to what it symbolizes in the book. Think of what symbolism you noticed while reading.

Symbolism may not be quite as obvious as the mockingbird. Perhaps your character dresses in dark colors and later buys one bright colored shirt. This could symbolize the readiness of the character to make a change in her life.

Symbols may be names, objects, or actions.

Allegories

Stories which allude to other literary works or which comment on conditions in life are called allegory. The allegory is written to be similar to a real life condition, but may be represented by animals or other things. *Watership Down* by Richard Adams is a good example. For more help: http://www.delmar.edu/swc/handouts/Literature_Website/Allegory.htm

Assignments

1. Read the following short story:

“The Cask of Amontillado” by Edgar Allen Poe

<http://www.classicreader.com/read.php/sid.6/bookid.454/>

Write 2 paragraphs identifying the theme and symbolism in the story. Due this week 40 points

Remember to introduce your paragraph with a topic sentence and with the name of the story, the author, and a very brief (one sentence) summary of the story.

2. Journal Entry 10 points Continue reading Watership Down by Richard Adams. You must complete the book by the end of Week 3.

Each week you will write an entry on the book. Hive entry #2: *see the Close Reading handout for description of what you should be including*. Be sure also to note allegories and symbols.

3. Weekly Shorts 5 points