

CENTRAL IDEA VS. THEME

**ADD THESE NOTES TO YOUR
HANDOUT.**

What is Theme?

It's a moral, a message, or a lesson learned about life.

What is Central Idea?

It's the idea that unifies the point of an article/text.

Theme:

- We usually refer to theme when we are talking about fictional texts (novels, short stories, poetry, plays...).
- Theme is a generality that can be applied to all people in life, not just the characters in the story or text.

Central Idea:

- We usually refer to central idea when we are talking about non-fictional texts (informational reading, articles,...) but it can also be found in fiction.
- Central Idea is specific to the text or story; it probably cannot be applied to you or me.

Example: **THEME** and **CENTRAL IDEA** - The Lion King.

The **THEME** of The Lion King - something that many people in life can relate to:

Everyone has to leave childhood behind in order to face adult responsibilities.

What is done deceitful will always be discovered.

The **CENTRAL IDEA** of The Lion King - specific to the story, all details in the text specifically support this central idea.

A young lion cub grows up to defeat his evil uncle and is able to reclaim the kingdom.

WHAT IS CENTRAL IDEA?

- CENTRAL IDEA refers to what the text is mainly about.
- Central idea is NOT the topic of the text.
- Central idea can most often be stated in one sentence.

APPLICATION

Julia's report card reflected poor grades. She felt she would get in trouble, so she hid her report card from her parents. When her parents discovered what her grades were, they grounded her for trying to hide the truth.

1. What is the **focus** of this paragraph?
2. What is the **central idea** of this paragraph?

WHAT IS THEME?

- Theme is the life lesson, author's message, or moral of a story.
- Readers have to make inferences to determine themes in literature because themes are NOT directly stated.
- In order to determine the theme of a story, readers have to think beyond the small details. Instead, readers must figure out the big world lesson of the theme.

WHAT IS THEME?

- Theme IS NOT the same as central idea.
- Theme IS NOT the same as topic.
- One story can have multiple themes.
- Themes are often recognizable and repeated throughout literature.

COMMON TOPICS FOR THEMES

NOTE:The following are not themes. They are common topics or big ideas on which themes are centered.

* Courage

* Hope

* Honesty

* Hard work

* Love

* Acceptance

* Kindness

* Jealousy

* Fears

* Being yourself

* Doing the right thing

COMMON THEMES

Topic of the theme

Message/lesson about the topic

- Be careful what you wish for.
- **Honesty** is the best policy.
- Crime doesn't pay.
- Sacrifice leads to reward.
- We are all the same on the inside.
- Money cannot buy happiness.
- Love conquers all.

Example

THEME

Fable (literature) - The Tortoise and The Hare

The tortoise and the hare (rabbit) have a race. The tortoise is known for being slow. The hare is known for running fast - like a rabbit. As the race begins, the tortoise just plods along. The hare runs fast and brags about being in the lead. At one point the hare is so self-confident that he stops to take a nap. While he is napping, the tortoise passes him, and wins the race.

THEME(s) for this story could be, "Slow and steady wins the race," or "It's better to be humble and persistent than arrogant."

These are both messages that the author shares about life, and can be applied to anyone, not just the characters in the story.

TO DETERMINE THEME...

1. Watch what happens to the main character
2. Check for an obvious statement of a theme
3. Check the title for clues
4. Look at the main conflict
5. What are the general topics? What is the message about them?

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