**Theme**

Theme is **NOT** the same as a subject. Theme is the **idea** the writer wishes to reveal **about** a subject. The author has a message, and it is expressed in the theme. It is *universal* statement, one that often can be used for a story, poem, book, play, or song. Always write the theme as a complete sentence. For example, “Love is more important than family loyalty”. Or “Humans are the most dangerous animal”. Or “War should not tear families apart”. Or “All cultures, even if they seem odd or unfamiliar, are worthy”. Love is **not** a theme, but a subject. What is the author’s message **ABOUT** love? A theme statement would be, “Love can be expressed in unhealthy ways sometimes”. NO CLICHES, please for the love of Pete! Get it?

Theme is very different from….

**Plot:**

Which is the order of events in a story. First this happens, then that. Plot is what the story is about, not the **message** it is trying to send.

# Theme and plot are often mixed up. Make sure you know the difference!

**Methods to Determine Theme:**

1. **Issue-specific strategy:**
   1. Start by listing all the issues the book deals with.
   2. Consider plot details that deal with the issue, and think about what traits they have in common.
   3. Based on those events, decide what statement the author seems to be saying about the issue.
   4. Write the theme statement in universal terms, but make it stronger by adding two other elements:
      1. *Because*…
      2. *So what…*
2. **Cause of change strategy:**
   1. Identify the beginning situation of the story: what characters, setting, social conditions surround the opening.
   2. Identify the ending situation of the same factors.
   3. Pinpoint when exactly the change occurred from the beginning to the end.
   4. What are the causes of the change?
   5. Based on that cause, determine a universal statement that explains the cause of the big change and the effect.
   6. Again make it stronger by adding two other elements:
      1. *Because*…
      2. *So what…*
3. **Other strategies:**
   1. Title: Does the title signify something about the story? Does it point to the truth the story reveals about life?
   2. Change: Does the main character change in the course of the story? Does the main character realize something he or she had not known before?
   3. Are any important statements about life or people made in the story—either by the narrator or characters in the story?
   4. Is the theme ever directly stated? If so, where is it stated? Quote it.

\*\*\*\*\*\* The theme of a short story, novel, poem, song, or play is not usually directly stated, but can be. \*\*\*\*\*