Identifying the Theme in Five Steps

To identify the theme, be sure that you’ve first identified the story’s plot, the way the story uses characterization, and the primary conflict in the story. Use these steps to determine the theme for a work:

1. Summarize the plot by writing a one-sentence description for the exposition, the conflict, the rising action, the climax, the falling action, and the resolution.

2. Identify the subject (topic) of the work.

3. Identify the insight or truth that was learned about the subject (topic).
   - How did the protagonist change?
   - What lesson did the protagonist learn from the resolution of the conflict?

4. State how the plot presents the primary insight or truth about the subject.

5. Write one or more generalized, declarative sentence(s) that state what was learned and how it was learned.

Remember, THEME IS:
- the central, underlying, and controlling idea or insight of a work of literature.
- the idea the writer wishes to convey about the subject—the writer’s view of the world or a revelation about human nature.

It is NOT:
- expressed in a single word
- the purpose of a work
- the moral or the conflict

THE THEME of MACBETH:
Writing Thesis Statements in 3 Steps--Option 1:

1. Begin with **In + your TAG, then add the subject of your thesis:**
   - examples:
     - **In + Title, Author, genre**
     - (TAG order does not matter.)
   - **who or what**
   - (optional) add an appositive phrase and/or subordinate clause about the who or what

2. Add a debatable phrase about the subject your claim:
   - examples:
     - is...
     - should...
     - should not...
     - highlights...
     - ignores...
     - guarantees...

3. Add an interpretation:
   - examples:
     - proving that...
     - resulting in...
     - making us doubt...
     - reminding us that...
     - suggesting that...

“In **William Shakespeare’s play Romeo and Juliet,** Romeo and Juliet foolishly kill themselves because they believe they cannot be together. Shakespeare reminds us that impulsive decisions can have terrible consequences.

Writing Thesis Statements in 3 Steps--Option 2:

1. Begin with **TAG:**
   - examples:
     - Title, Author, genre
     - (TAG order does not matter)

2. Add a debatable phrase:
   - examples:
     - is about...
     - highlights...
     - guarantees...

3. Add an interpretation:
   - examples:
     - (see example below)

“**Shakespeare’s Hamlet is a play** about one person’s search for revenge, resulting in the deaths of almost everyone. Revenge is not only unhealthy, but it is also a dangerous motivation and can ruin lives.

THE THESIS of YOUR ESSAY:
SOURCE #1 MACBETH’S CONNECTION TO THESIS
Example

Discussion

SOURCE #2 HISTORICAL EVENT THAT SUPPORTS THESIS
Source Title

Summary

Short Quote

Author, Date, Paragraph #

SOURCE #3 CURRENT EVENT THAT SUPPORTS THESIS
Source Title

Summary

Short Quote

Author, Date, Paragraph #
THE SYNTHESIS CONCLUSION

Explain why this theme and this evidence is important.

- **Play the “So What” Game.** If you’re stuck and feel like your conclusion isn’t saying anything new or interesting, ask a friend to read it with you. Whenever you make a statement from your conclusion, ask the friend to say, “So what?” or “Why should anybody care?” Then ponder that question and answer it.

- **Synthesize, don’t summarize.** Don’t simply repeat things that were in your paper. Instead, show your reader how the points you made and the support and examples you used fit together. Pull it all together.

- Include a provocative insight or quotation from the research or reading you did for your paper.

- Point to broader implications or impacts.

SYNTHESIZE (CONNECT) YOUR EXAMPLES TO A UNIVERSAL TRUTH: