Theme Notes from Story and Structure

The **theme** of a piece of fiction is its central insight into life (it is a unifying generalization about life state or implied)

To discover the theme of a story, the reader must try to discover the author's central purpose.

JACK NICHOLSON ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOOS NEST	Question	What is Kesey's central purpose in <u>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's</u> <u>Nest</u> ?
	Answer	His main purpose is to examine the conflict between the individual and authority.
Possible Themes		 Unless the individual realizes his potential power, he may be dominated by an inhumane authoritarian machinery. or Authority which prevents the individual from exercising his basic human rights is a destructive force.

Theme Exists When

- a. an author seriously attempts to record life accurately or to reveal a truth about it
- b. he has introduced theories about life which he then uses to illustrate some aspects of life.

How Does The Reader Detect The Theme of A Piece of Fiction?

- 1. Start with a clear idea of the characters, situation and plot.
 - (Ask in what way the main character has changed and what has he learned before the story's end.)
 - (Why did the characters act as they did?)
 - (Look closely at events and/or characters that seem irrelevant to the main line of action. Why are they included?)
- 2. Examine closely the central conflict

(Explore the story's central conflict and its outcome)

- 3. Examine the story's title.
 - (Titles often provide significant clues.)
- 4. Look for literary devices such as symbolism, irony, etc.

The theme must fit the story; it must give meaning to every part and be suggested by every part.

To Write Tl	neme Statements, One Must Keep the Following Principles In Mind:		
1.	Theme must be expressed in a complete sentence (with subject and predicate). "The theme is about love" is not a theme statement.		
2.	Theme must be stated as a generalization about life. (In stating theme one must avoid using the names of characters in the story.)		
	wrongThe theme of "The Lottery" is that Tessie followed tradition.betterOne of the themes of "The Lottery" is that people follow traditions without questioning them.		
3.	The reader must not make the generalization larger than justified by the scope of the story. Avoid using such terms as 'everyone', 'all', 'always'		
	wrong The theme of "The Japanese Quince" is that Spring stirs vague longings in everyone's heart.		
	better During spring a possibility exists for those upper-middle class individuals whose lives are bound by respectability and isolation to free themselves from their limiting lives. Unfortunately, their desires for freedom are too weak to overcome their deep-seated habits.		
4.	Theme is the central and unifying concept of a story.		
	 a. It must account for all major details of the story b. It must not be contradicted by any detail in the story c. It must exist inside not outside the story (should be directly suggested by the story) 		
5.	Theme can be stated in various ways. There are no magic solutions to detecting theme of a story, only guidelines.		
6.	Avoid confusing a theme with a moral. Sometimes a theme may be expressed as a moral principle. But a moral in itself is usually a narrow view of		
	a story. Thus avoid reducing a theme statement to a cliché or old familiar sayings such as "Don't judge a book by its cover."		
	The question you should always keep in mind is		
	Why did the author write this story?		