

To Write Theme 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.)

wrong The theme of “The Lottery” is that Tessie followed tradition.
better One 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?