

Common Themes in Literature

These are a just a few of the many possible literary subjects and themes. The point to remember is that a subject is not a theme: a subject is **some dimension of the human condition examined by the work**; *a theme is a statement, direct or implied, about the subject*. The themes about the subjects on the list are still fairly general. As a critical writer discussing a particular literary work, you'll need to bring your observations about theme closer to the work. Note: Usually you will need to find the specific theme on your own. To do this, remember: *literature is art that comments on the experience of being a human being*.

- Man's search for meaning; purpose of life
- The Quest—the hero's quest to find meaning, etc.
- Humanism—greatness of man; what makes people great
- Determinism vs. free agency
- Evil—what is true evil/is there really any such thing as evil?
- Good—what is it to lead the good life?
- Revenge--How it affects the soul
- Justice vs. Mercy
- Greed—how it affects the individual; how affects society
- Death--fear of death; dealing with the unknown
- Love/True love—is it possible, what is it, etc.; Lovers vs. society
- Psychology, the power/beauty of the human mind
- Power—power corrupts; man's hunger for power
- Growth--Questing Hero; what is needed for growth
- Change—the need for change; why change is difficult; should people try to change or should they accept themselves
- Alienation—is man essentially alone in the universe? (Existentialism)
- Nature-- influence on man; human nature as well; man vs nature conflict
- Conflict—man vs man; man vs God
- Conflict—man vs himself
- Loss of innocence vs. gaining experience
- The individual vs. society
- Transformation, purification, baptism, rebirth, initiation
- Spirituality—what constitutes spirituality?
- Human relations; social responsibility
- Time—Carpe Diem, greater importance of meaningful life than more living
- Redemption—how to become truly human, perhaps even god-like
- Freedom—what is it to be truly free
- Feminism—objectification of women; limitations of male worldview; what constitutes womanhood; female principle
- Balance—yin yang
- Sacrifice—Christ figure; sacrificial scapegoat figure
- Corruption

- Hope
- Courage—what is courage/cowardice
- Creativity
- Art—power of art to transform man