

Theme is a timeless and universal message about life that an author tries to send his reader through the characters, conflicts, relationships, settings, and actual story plot.

1. Watch the following video about theme to help you understand more.

<https://www.teachertube.com/videos/what-is-a-theme-cinderella-edition-416977>

2. Read the following poem. Write a theme sentence about the central message of the poem.

Remember:

(a) A theme is not one word.

(b) A theme is a sentence that can apply to anyone and a theme sentence should never contain a character's name.

(c) What are the consequences of the characters in the poem's actions? What can all people learn from the things that the character experiences?

3. Read the following poem and questions taken from the free resource [Commonlit.org](https://www.commonlit.org/). Read the poem and then answer the questions below.

Immigrants in Our Own Land by Jimmy Santiago Baca

We are born with dreams in our hearts,
looking for better days ahead.
At the gates we are given new papers,
our old clothes are taken
and we are given overalls like mechanics wear.
We are given shots and doctors ask questions.
Then we gather in another room
where counselors orient us to the new land
we will now live in. We take tests.
Some of us were craftsmen in the old world,
good with our hands and proud of our work.
Others were good with their heads.
They used common sense like scholars
use glasses and books to reach the world.
But most of us didn't finish high school.

The old men who have lived here stare at us,
from deep disturbed eyes, sulking, retreated.
We pass them as they stand around idle,
leaning on shovels and rakes or against walls.
Our expectations are high: in the old world,
they talked about rehabilitation,
about being able to finish school,
and learning an extra good trade.
But right away we are sent to work as dishwashers,
to work in fields for three cents an hour.
The administration says this is temporary
So we go about our business, blacks with blacks,
poor whites with poor whites,
chicanos and indians by themselves.

The administration says this is right,
no mixing of cultures, let them stay apart,
like in the old neighborhoods we came from.

We came here to get away from false promises,
from dictators in our neighborhoods,
who wore blue suits and broke our doors down
when they wanted, arrested us when they felt like,
swinging clubs and shooting guns as they pleased.
But it's no different here. It's all concentrated.
The doctors don't care, our bodies decay,
our minds deteriorate, we learn nothing of value.
Our lives don't get better, we go down quick.

My cell is crisscrossed with laundry lines,
my T-shirts, boxer shorts, socks and pants are drying.
Just like it used to be in my neighborhood:
from all the tenements laundry hung window to window.
Across the way Joey is sticking his hands
through the bars to hand Felipe a cigarette,
men are hollering back and forth cell to cell,
saying their sinks don't work,
or somebody downstairs hollers angrily
about a toilet overflowing,
or that the heaters don't work.

I ask Coyote next door to shoot me over
a little more soap to finish my laundry.
I look down and see new immigrants coming in,
mattresses rolled up and on their shoulders,
new haircuts and brogan boots,
looking around, each with a dream in their heart,
thinking they'll get a chance to change their lives.

But in the end, some will just sit around
talking about how good the old world was.
Some of the younger ones will become gangsters.
Some will die and others will go on living
without a soul, a future, or a reason to live.
Some will make it out of here with hate in their eyes,
but so very few make it out of here as human
as they came in, they leave wondering what good they are now
as they look at their hands so long away from their tools,
as they look at themselves, so long gone from their families,
so long gone from life itself, so many things have changed.

"Immigrants in Our Own Land" by Jimmy Santiago Baca, from Immigrants in Our Own Land.
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Directions Publishing Corp., www.ndpublishing.com. Source: Immigrants in Our Own Land (New
Directions Publishing Corporation, 1990)

Answer the following questions about theme:

1. Which two sentences best describe main themes of the novel:
 - A. The cruel reality that many immigrants face can gradually rob them of their humanity.
 - B. Things are always changing, so people should make decisions without a fear of change.
 - C. As people grow older, they must evaluate--and sometimes give up--their dreams.
 - D. People who wish to improve their own lives should heed the lessons of their elders.
 - E. Many people mistakenly believe that life will improve if they start over in a new place.
 - F. As long as they work hard, all immigrants who come to this country can enjoy success.

2. Which of the following two quotes best supports the answer to the sentences you chose in question one:
 - A. "The old men who have lived here stare at us/from deep disturbed eyes"
 - B. "The administration says this is temporary/so we go about our business"
 - C. "The doctors don't care, our bodies decay"
 - D. "With a dream in their heart/thinking they'll get a chance to change their lives"
 - E. "'Others will go on living/without a soul, a future, or a reason to live"
 - F. "Gone from life itself, so many things have changed"

3. How does working in roles like dishwasher and field hand initially affect the speaker?
 - A. The speaker is satisfied at first with these opportunities to earn money.
 - B. The speaker feels disappointed but believes things will quickly get better.
 - C. The speaker wishes to complain about this poor treatment to the administration.
 - D. The speaker feels upset but understands that everyone must start at the bottom.

4. What impact does the repetition of the word "some" in the lines underlined in the poem have on the poem's tone?
 - A. It creates a curious tone, as the speaker wonders which path the immigrants will take in their lives.
 - B. It produces an informative tone, as the speaker recites a list of possible paths without displaying emotion.
 - C. It creates a resigned tone, as the speaker sees little hope in the future lives of the new immigrants.
 - D. It produces a cautionary tone, as the speaker warns young people of the consequences of giving up their dreams.

When you're ready [click this link](#) to see the answers.

Assignment: Find a song and paste the lyrics here. Then write a theme statement/ message that all people can understand from the song (see template below). When you paste your lyrics, highlight words and phrases that prove the theme you state.

The theme of the song _____ by _____ is

_____.