



Name: **AP Literature / Bukowski**

Period:

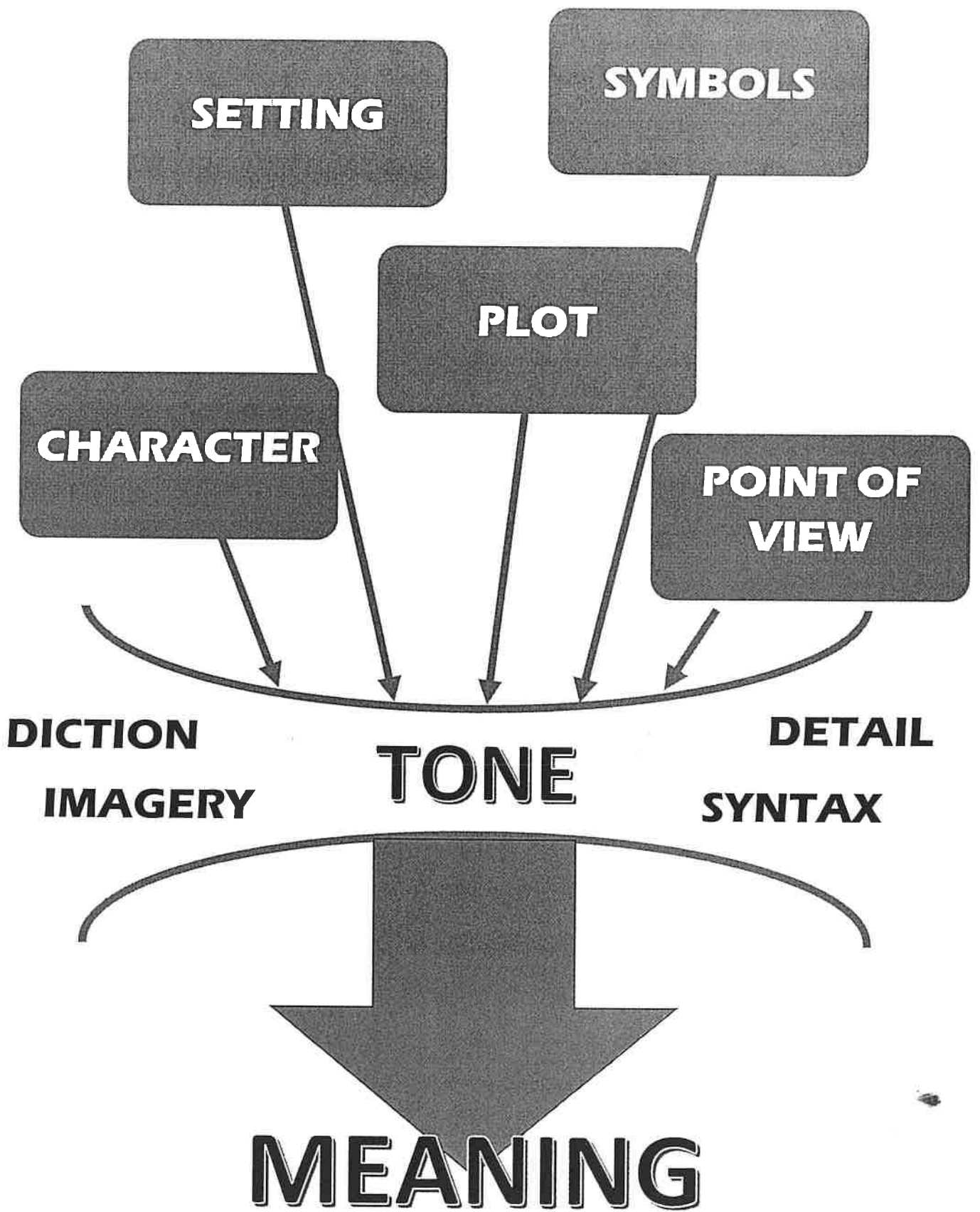


# Theme IS

- A \_\_\_\_\_ about the author's \_\_\_\_\_ regarding his/her topic.
  - In other words, authors are providing their \_\_\_\_\_ by writing poetry / prose / novels, etc.
  - \_\_\_\_\_; the author's message is a "big picture" statement about \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Associated with the author's \_\_\_\_\_ (Think about what the author would say about Topic X if s/he were sitting next to you).
  - \_\_\_\_\_: it will not be provided directly in the text; you the reader must look for clues \_\_\_\_\_.
- Hint: Analyze plot development, characterization and values/motivation, style and tone!*
- Look at the \_\_\_\_\_ of the work to determine the outcomes for all the characters. If there are archetypes / symbols, what does the resolution / outcome suggest?
  - Is a DECLARATIVE \_\_\_\_\_!

# Theme IS NOT

- A \_\_\_\_\_  
*Ex) Love, Childhood, War, Identity*
- A \_\_\_\_\_ - a moral is a piece of practical advice that can be gained from the reading, while theme is MORE complex and does not have advice  
*Ex) Slow and steady wins the race.*
- A \_\_\_\_\_  
*Ex) Adults must teach their children to survive.*
- A \_\_\_\_\_  
*Ex) You can't have your cake and eat it too.*
- An \_\_\_\_\_  
*Ex) If stability is important, then marry for money.*
- A " \_\_\_\_\_  
*Ex) The discovery of lies can mentally destroy you.*
- An \_\_\_\_\_ (to + a verb)  
*Ex) To live is to love.*
- A \_\_\_\_\_  
*Ex) To be or not to be?*
- A \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective)  
*Ex) The theme is depressing.*
- A \_\_\_\_\_  
*Ex) Romeo and Juliet's theme shows that Romeo committed suicide due to destiny.*



*dKd There!*

## Characteristics of a Theme Statement

### Purposes of the Theme Statement

The theme statement can help you interpret and write about literature in two main ways: (1) it forces you to decide on a clear, simple interpretation before you begin writing, and (2) it provides your reader with a summary of your interpretation.

### Characteristics of a Good Theme Statement

A successful theme statement must be general enough to capture the overall meaning of the work, but specific enough so that it conveys your unique interpretation. If your theme statement follows the following guidelines, and if you don't misread or misinterpret the work, you will be starting your essay on the right foot.

1. In a sense, every literary work makes a statement or has a point. When you create a theme statement, you're substituting your single sentence for the entire poem. That means that you have to simplify the meaning somewhat to get it into a single sentence, but nevertheless, your theme statement itself should make a point. The theme statement should be a complete sentence. "Love and death" (for example) is not a theme statement. It's just an announcement of the topic of the work. What in particular is the author saying about love and death? A sentence like "The theme of the poem is love and death" is grammatically speaking a complete sentence, but if you remove the beginning of the sentence ("The theme of the poem is"), then you don't have a complete sentence, just a wordy announcement of the topic.
2. The theme statement should describe the general meaning of the work, not the specific events, actions, or characters. The statement "Luke defeats Darth Vader" is not a theme statement but a plot summary. Instead of describing what the characters do, discuss what they represent ("Good defeats evil"). Often the theme statement takes the form of a moral or a judgement ("We cannot defeat an external evil until we acknowledge our own dark side"). Of course this overall theme results from what the characters do (or from the literal meaning of words in a poem), and in supporting your general interpretation, you should cite some of these specific details.
3. The theme statement should reflect the values of the entire work, not just one or two episodes or lines. In particular, look at the end of the work to make sure that the story's outcome matches what you think its general meaning is.

Pop quiz: Which of the following is a valid theme statement according to the above guidelines?

1. The true meaning of love.
2. Mrs. Farquar learns that British people can't dance.
3. Because the main character commits suicide, the theme is that we should all commit suicide.
4. It is better to have loved and lost than never to have lost at all.

Taken From: <http://www.gpc.edu/~shale/humanities/composition/handouts/theme.html>

## Theme

Theme in literature is the, "so what" statement, in that it is the central controlling idea in a piece of literature. In a sense, theme is the main idea or ideas that the author wishes to convey to his/her audience. Of course, there can be many ideas in a literary work. When these ideas are put into complete sentences or assertions, they are called the theme.

**There is no prescribed way to find the theme of a story.** However, the theme—or major ideas in a work—can be unraveled by analyzing the story's action, character depictions, ways in which a character changes in the course of the story, through the central conflict and outcome, what a character learns, as well as specific scenes, language used, and finally the title of the piece.

**What the writer says about an idea or his/her attitude about an idea is a good definition of theme. You might:**

- Analyze the idea, as it applies to a character.
- Explain how actions bring out the idea.
- Explain how dialogue and separate speeches bring out an idea.
- Explain how the work's structure is determined by the idea.
- Deal with a combination of these (together with any other significant aspect).
  
- **The theme should be expressible in the form of a statement, with a subject and a predicate.** It is insufficient to say the theme of a story is loyalty; these are simply subjects. Instead, theme must be a statement about the subject. For instance, "Loyalty to country inspires heroic self-sacrifice."
- **The theme should only be stated as a generalization about life.** When stating the theme, do not use the names of specific characters or refer to precise places or events; to do so is to make a specific, rather than a general statement.
- **The generalization cannot be larger than the parameters of the story. Avoid:** every, all, always. **Use:** some, sometimes, may.
- **The theme is the central and unifying concept of a story.** Therefore, it accounts for all the major details of a story, the theme is not contradicted by any detail of the story, and cannot rely solely on implied facts (facts that are actually stated clearly or directly in the story). The theme exists inside, not outside, the story.
- **Do not reduce the theme to a cliché or trite statement**, such as "You can't judge a book by its cover." Although these statements may accurately state the theme, they impoverish the essential meaning of the story.

When concluding an analysis of theme, summarize the validity or force of the idea. If you have been convinced, you might say the author has expressed the idea forcefully. You might also show the relevance of the idea to current conditions. If you are not persuaded by the idea, you should demonstrate the idea's shortcomings or limitations. If you wish to mention a related idea from another work, be sure to stress the connection.

**AP questions generally ask you to analyze a piece of fiction identifying how the author uses various literary techniques to present theme or character. Your statement of theme depends on a close reading of the literature. Be sure (especially in timed writing situations) that you have a clear concept of theme before you begin writing.**

Linda Davey, Rio Rancho High School  
Arp, Thomas A. and Greg Johnson, eds. *Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense*. 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2011. Print.

# THE GREAT QUESTIONS

*Great literature of all cultures deals with one or more of the following questions:*

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## I. What is the nature of the universe—the cosmos?

Is the universe hostile / beneficent / indifferent to humanity?

What is the nature of evil? What is the source of evil?

Why, if God is good, does He allow evil to exist? (The Problem of Evil)

Why, if God is just, does He allow the good to suffer? (The Problem of Pain)

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## II. What is God's relationship to humans?

Does God exist?

Is God the Creator?

Is God concerned about humanity?

Is God indifferent toward humanity?

Should humans fear / obey / love / sacrifice to / praise / propitiate / pray to God?

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## What is the nature of God?

Is God (gods) basically:

an angry God? a proud God?

a jealous God? a kind God?

Is God all good?

Does God Himself bring evil to humanity and cause suffering?

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## III. What is the nature of human beings?

Are humans basically good or evil?

Are people determined or do we have free will?

Are people noble—more divine than animal? or

Are people degraded, corrupt—more animal than spirit?

Are people a balance? If so, how is the balance preserved?

What is the human being's greatest faculty? reason? imagination?

Do humans have a soul? Can they achieve immortality? How?

Are humans in the universe by design or by chance? If by design, why?

What is a human's basic purpose in life? Is there a purpose?

To save the human soul?

To find happiness? If so, what is happiness and how are we to achieve it?

What is the "good" life for humans? How can life gain significance?

How can people give value to their lives?

How can people find their greatest satisfaction, completeness, fulfillment?

How do people establish values, ethics, morals? What are their bases?

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## IV. What is the relationship of one human to another?

How are we to treat people? Are all people to be treated as equals?

On what basis should we / do we evaluate our fellow humans?

Are we basically social animals or anti-social ones?

How are we to establish an orderly existence with other humans?

What is the "ideal" or "good" society? How can it be established?

Under what social system can people best flourish?

On what base should we regulate our association with other people?

# 32 Master Themes

- Alienation** - creating emotional isolation
- Betrayal** - fading bonds of love
- Birth** - life after loss, life sustains tragedy
- Coming of age** - boy becomes a man
- Conformity** - industrialization and the conformity of man
- Death** - death as mystery, death as a new beginning
- Deception** - appearance versus reality
- Discovery** - conquering unknown, discovering strength
- Duty** - the ethics of killing for duty
- Escape** - escape from family pressures, escaping social constraints
- Family** - destruction of family
- Fortune** - a fall from grace and fortune
- Generation gap** - experience versus youthful strength
- God and spirituality** - inner struggle of faith
- Good and evil** - the coexistence of good and evil on earth
- Heroism** - false heroism, heroism and conflicting values
- Home** - security of a homestead
- Hope** - hope rebounds
- Hopelessness** - finding hope after tragedy
- Individualism** - choosing between security and individualism
- Isolation** - the isolation of a soul
- Journey** - most journeys lead back to home
- Judgment** - balance between justice and judgment
- Loss** - loss of innocence, loss of individualism
- Love** - love sustains/fades with a challenge
- Patriotism** - inner conflicts stemming from patriotism
- Peace and war** - war is tragic, peace is fleeting
- Power** - lust for power
- Race relations** - learned racism
- Sense of self** - finding strength from within
- Suffering** - suffering as a natural part of human experience
- Survival** - man against nature

*Definition of Theme: Marysville (TN) High School Composition Guide*  
<http://www.ci.maryville.tn.us/mhs/studyskills/compguide/LitAnaTheme.htm>

*Theme List: M. Wood, Patriot High School, Riverside, CA*  
<https://sites.google.com/a/patriothighschool.com/english-10-2011-12/assignments/themes>

*Identifying Themes in Literature*

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**Goal:**

Once you have a universal theme in mind, you must narrow it down to a theme statement. This statement represents the idea the writer wishes to convey about the subject - the writer's view of the world or observation about human nature.

**Investigate:**

Brainstorm aspects of the story that seem to relate to your universal theme. Look at the following areas: title, character, plot, point of view, symbols, allusions and patterns.

**Compose:** Write on or more generalized, declarative sentences that state what was learned and how it was learned.

**Ask yourself:**

Is this theme supported by evidence from the work itself?

Are all the author's choices of plot, character, conflict and tone controlled by this theme?

Possible universal themes to get you started.

abuse of power

beauty

courage

fall from grace

fear

friendship

heritage

innocence

loyalty

nature

parent-child relationships

perseverance

price of progress

religion

security/safety

the overlooked

winners and losers

action vs apathy

coming of age

effects of the past

family

fear of failure

greed

heroes

justice

manipulation

need for change

peace

Power of the mind vs authority

pride

revenge

seizing the moment

the road not taken

beating the odds

corruption

faith

fate

freedom

hate

honesty

love

mothering

obligation

peer pressure

prejudice

quest for knowledge

secrecy

survival

war

Universal Theme:

Title: *Explain how the title might indicate or emphasize some important aspect of the universal theme.*

Character: *List the protagonist's lessons learned, struggles, motivations, and anything else that seems to set him or her apart from the rest.*

Plot: *List significant events and conflict that occur. Explain how conflicts are dealt with or resolved.*

Point of View: *List the narrator's comments about other characters and lessons learned. Explain how the narrator is involved with significant events and conflicts.*

Symbols, Allusions & Patterns: *List any symbols, etc. that relate to the universal theme.*

Theme Statement: (What is the idea that the writer wishes to convey about the subject?)