



# **WHAT IS A THEME STATEMENT?**

# PURPOSES OF A 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.



# CHARACTERISTIC 1

- 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.



## CHARACTERISTIC 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 judgment ("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.



## CHARACTERISTIC 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.



## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS A VALID THEME STATEMENT ACCORDING TO THE ABOVE GUIDELINES?

- The true meaning of love.
- Mrs. Farquar learns that British people can't dance.
- Because the main character commits suicide, the theme is that we should all commit suicide.
- Hardships can make or break relationships.`

