

LANGUAGE ARTS 10
THE CRUCIBLE – Theme

Name: _____ Date: _____

In literature, THEME is the “insight about human nature that is revealed in the literary work,” according to your text book. The problem is, authors don’t come right out and tell you the theme or themes of their work. Readers have to infer these based on evidence in the text. So, how do you figure out what is being revealed about human nature? That’s the hard part.

First, themes are NOT one word! These ideas that can be expressed in one word are “big ideas” or motifs, and are important, but a theme is always a statement.

Avoid thinking of theme as a “moral” of the story. Not every piece of literature is a Disney story. If you’re looking for a positive “lesson,” you may look a long time—especially in more modern literature.

Also, avoid stating themes as clichés, like “don’t judge a book by the cover” or “life’s what you make it.” These are rarely—if ever—the theme of a good piece of literature.

Finally, remember that there is often more than one theme in a piece of literature and that themes are open to some interpretation. (Although, it is possible to be completely wrong about a theme if you misinterpret the text!)

Here are some steps to determining/analyzing theme in pieces of literature:

- Pay attention to the “big ideas” or motifs in a piece of literature. These are things that come up over and over again (and sometimes they are mentioned in the title, too!) Some of these big ideas may develop into a theme throughout the course of a piece of literature, but be aware that not ALL big ideas are themes (sometimes they may be symbols or something else). You can often determine theme by asking yourself, “What is the author saying/showing about ___ big idea?” or “How were the characters/events of the piece affected by ___ big idea?”
- Pay attention to the characters—especially the dynamic characters who change through the course of the piece. Often authors use characters to demonstrate their “insight about human nature.” You can often determine a theme by asking yourself how the characters have changed and what that says about human nature.
- Be patient! Themes are not apparent at the beginning of a piece of literature. You will have to read the whole thing before you can properly determine theme.

**LANGUAGE ARTS 10
DETERMINING THEME**

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. Working with “Big Ideas”

- A. List at least one “Big Idea” in the story:

- B. How does this big idea affect the characters or events of the story?

- C. Based on your answer to B, what do you think the author was trying to show about human nature and this big idea? Remember to write this in a sentence.

2. Thinking about Characters:

Name of Dynamic Character	How did this Character change?	What insight about human nature does this demonstrate? (Be sure to write this in a sentence.)