

IDENTIFYING THEMES

Remember that when asked for a theme of a text, you should write your response in a complete sentence phrased as a universal truth.

*Suggestion—take an idea or topic and make it the subject of your sentence. Then add the predicate that fits.

Ideas/topics covered in literature (NOT themes)	Themes
Isolation	Isolation often leads to hopelessness.
Love and loss	Love and loss are natural and necessary to the human experience.
Moving on from a difficult past	Moving on from a difficult past allows for personal growth.

Where do we look for themes in a text? Here are a few things to consider with all texts:

1. Narrative Perspective—what is the teller of the story saying between the lines?
2. Characters—what do characters say through their words and actions?
3. Literary devices and other narrative techniques—what does the author suggest through the way he/she tells the story?

Theme Considerations for “The Bear”

When searching for thematic ideas that emerge during the reading of this text, consider the following questions. While these questions will not lead us to every idea represented in the text, they will give us a number of specific places we can actually look for elements of theme.

1. What ideas/themes do the characters seem to support through their words?
**Be sure to consider the sources of these statements. Is the reader to take them seriously?
 - What does Mrs. Popov say about love?
 - What does Mr. Smirnov say about women?
 - What Luka’s argument to Mrs. Popov regarding her current behavior?
2. What ideas/themes do the characters themselves (or their actions) seem to embody?
 - How do Smirnov’s and Popov’s past experiences with love define them as characters? How do these experiences shape their present actions?
 - What idea regarding love do Popov and Smirnov seem to represent?
 - What does Popov and Smirnov’s fast-paced, emotionally charged encounter say about love? Relationships? Men and women?

3. Consider any figurative language you see in the text. Toward what ideas/themes does it seem to be pointing the reader?
 - How might Toby and his oats be considered a symbol? What is a related theme?
 - What theme stems from the symbolic title of the play?
 - What theme can we extrapolate from Popov's words, "I'm caught like a mouse in a trap" (252)?
4. How does the work itself and all of its parts/techniques suggest other ideas/themes?
 - What ideas/themes are revealed in the asides? How about the stage directions?
 - Are there other ideas/themes revealed in dialogue that we haven't yet mentioned?
 - Is the fact that this is a very short one-act play significant?