

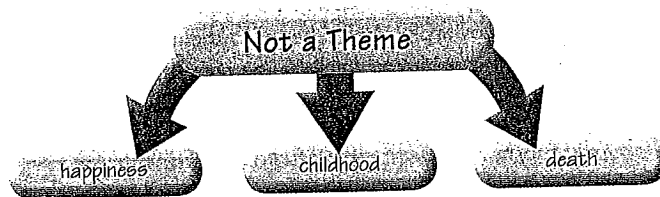
# Uncovering Theme

## Most Important Word

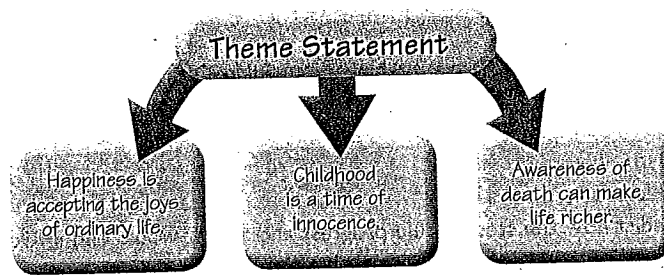
Has your teacher ever asked you that dreaded theme question—the one that begins “What is the theme of . . . ?” What do you do when you hear that question? A group of seventh-graders all immediately started turning the pages of their books when their teacher asked them. “Why are you doing that?” she asked. “I’m looking for the theme,” one student replied. “Yeah,” another said, “I sure hope the writer remembered to include it.”

### What Is Theme?

Well, the writer did include it, but not in the way the students were hoping. Writers don’t end (or begin) their stories with a nice note to the reader that says, “And the theme of the story is . . .” No, instead writers let their readers meet the characters and share an experience with them. At the end of the experience, the reader, along with the characters, has discovered something about human experience. It might be something the reader already knows but rediscovers under new circumstances. It might be something new. The **theme**, then, is a truth about life or people that we discover as we share the characters’ experiences.

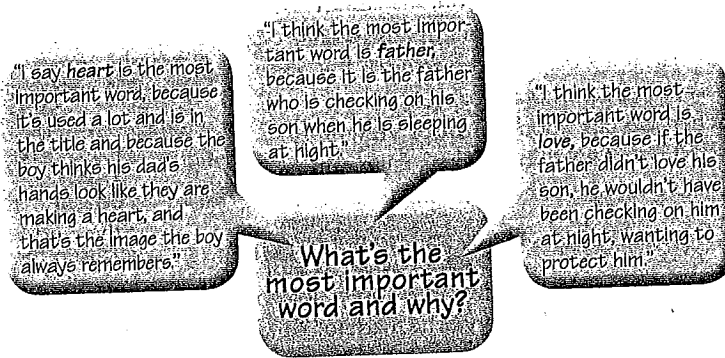


When you write or state a theme, remember that a theme isn't a word or a phrase—it's at least one sentence!



### Most Important Word

If you need help writing a theme statement, try a strategy called **Most Important Word**. After you've read a selection, skim through it again looking for the word in the text you think is most important. Here are comments three students made after reading a poem called "The Secret Heart" by Robert P. Tristram Coffin. In this poem a father checks on his son, who is sleeping.



After deciding on the most important word and coming up with reasons for your choice, think about how that word could be related to the theme. Since different readers can pull different themes from the same selection, statements of themes usually differ from reader to reader. Look at the following three themes those three students stated, and match them to the comments above.

1. A parent's love for a child is never-ending—it goes on day and night.
2. Children remember their parents' simple acts of love.
3. A father is his child's protector.