

Honors English 9: Template for Writing Theme

Directions: Writing a theme for any text requires full comprehension of the studied text as well as careful and deliberate writing. The following template breaks down these two demands into manageable steps. Study the modeled example below before working on one of your own.

1. What is the text? "Fame is a Bee" by Emily Dickinson

2. What general topics does the text focus on? Fame, rumor, gossip, popularity.

3. What is the purpose of the text?

The purpose of the text seems to suggest that while fame carries a certain importance and power in life, it also is venomous and fleeting.

4. Since interpretative writers are like to question and challenge cliché beliefs that are taught to us in childhood, how do you know the insight above does not fall into that category?

Fame is generally viewed as favorable, especially in our society, which places value on people who are popular. It would be cliché to suggest it is only positive. Instead, the poem generally expresses a tone counter to our culture's view of fame, noting its negative connotations and its ability to inflict harm on people. It is also a reminder that fame does not often last forever, despite its power. These last two points are generally more interesting because people do not think of them immediately; therefore, I will focus on expressing something about the negative aspects of fame.

5. Formulate a theme that expresses a theme that is a generalization about life but not a universal one. In other words, avoid terms like *every, all, always, never, everyone, anyone, will*. Use terms like *some, frequently, sometimes, oftentimes, seldom, mostly, most of the time, generally, and may*.

Simpler Theme: *While fame is alluring and powerful, it also has an ability to inflict significant pain.*

More Sophisticated Theme: *While it is alluring and powerful, fame is generally undesirable. It has the ability to inflict significant pain*

because its power mostly resides in others. Here I ask the simple question "Why?" and answer it with a dependent clause that makes it more intellectual.

Checklist:

- A. At a minimum, is my theme stated as a complete sentence? Yes or No
- B. Is my theme a generalization about the human condition? Yes or No
- C. Do I avoid "all-or-none" diction (word choice) and 1st/2nd person? Yes or No
- D. Is the theme central to the text or outside the text? Central to the text*

*Mental Note: I link the pain of fame to the venomous sting expressed in the poem. I also link the notion of fame flying away to a bee's behavior as it moves busily from one place to another. While theme must apply to the world in a general sense, I use the poem, NOT the world around me, to develop my theme. A good theme is evidenced first and foremost by the text, NOT by ideas outside the text.

Directions: Recall your Socratic circle and your Venn diagram notes on “First Amendment” and “Code Breaking.” Work alone or with a partner to develop a theme.

1. What is the text?

“First Amendment” and “Code Breaking” in *Speak*

2. What general topics does the text focus on?

Speaking, particularly the right to speak but how/when to do so or not.

3. What is the purpose of the text (these chapters)?

4. Since interpretative writers are like to question and challenge cliché beliefs that are taught to us in childhood, how do you know the insight above does not fall into that category?

5. Formulate a theme that expresses a theme that is a generalization about life but not a universal one. In other words, avoid terms like *every, all, always, never, everyone, anyone, will*. Use terms like *some, frequently, sometimes, seldom, generally, may*.

Checklist:

- A. At a minimum, is my theme stated as a complete sentence? Yes or No
- B. Is my theme a generalization about the human condition? Yes or No
- C. Do I avoid “all-or-none” diction (word choice) and 1st/2nd person? Yes or No
- D. Is the theme central to the text or outside the text? Central to the text¹

¹ In this case, it must encapsulate both of Anderson’s chapters but also the main conflict of the novel.