

Literature themes

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A theme refers to an aspect of a story that is regularly repeated throughout the story. It is mostly the moral lesson that underlies the story and can be identified by many people who read the story. Themes may vary from one story to another depending on the writer's purpose and subliminal mission when writing the book.

For instance, in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the writer explores the theme of insanity and mental deterioration. The story begins with an unnamed and unidentified narrator telling us about his nervousness. The story is told in first person omniscient narration style thus creating a sense of attachment and proximity to the events taking place in the story. The narrator is quick to point out that he is not mad even though he kills an old man because he fears the old man's eye. This might be taken as a clear indication of the narrator's insanity and further delusion and denial of his condition. "I think it was his eye!... Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees --very gradually --I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever (*The Tell-Tale Heart*)." To make matters worse, the narrator decides to kill the old man, not for any other reason such as revenge, robbery or anger.

The narrator goes on to push his claims of sanity by explaining that a mad man would not have exercised so much caution, planning or skill in killing the old man. He, on the other hand, was painstakingly slow and cautious in planning and executing his murder. For instance, he stealthily trailed the old man in his room at night and took an hour just to open the door. "I thrust in my head very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I

could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! would a mad man have been so wise as this...(The Tell-Tale Heart)”

After killing and hiding the old man, police officers arrive after being tipped off by a neighbor who heard a shriek in the middle of the night. The narrator cheerfully welcomes the officers and begins making small talk with them. The narrator lets the officers comb the house in order to dispel any of their previous suspicion. In a further show of courage and presumable insanity, the narrator lets the officers stay in the room where he has concealed the old man’s body. The narrator begins hearing a low, thudding sound like that of the old man’s heart. He is petrified and thinks that even the officers can hear the thudding heart. The narrator therefore gives himself up to the police and confesses his crime.

The story of an old man with enormous wings is told by an omniscient narrator in third person narration style. The story is basically about an old man who is presumed to be an angel because of his wings. The story examines the themes of cruelty and exploitation. The old angel falls into Pelayo’s homestead due to exhaustion and weariness from flying. A wise neighbor warns them that the angel was actually on a mission to take the soul of their young child. As a result of fear and outright curiosity, Pelayo and his wife Elisenda decide to keep the angel in a chicken coop. word of the angel’s presence spreads throughout the nation and people come from far and wide just to have a glimpse of the angel. Some ailing people come with the hope that the angel might have some healing powers.

Pelayo decides to take advantage of this inflow of visitors to make some money for himself and his family. He starts charging five cents to see the angel. This is an act of exploitation and capitalism. Despite the immense amounts of money made from the angel, Pelayo does nothing to improve the condition of the chicken coop. In reaction to the angel's silence and lack of movement, the visitors taunt him by throwing stones, gawking at him and even burning him with a piece of iron. These are inhumane acts directed towards the angel. Elisenda is thus relieved when the angel finally grows new wings and regains the ability to fly away.

The yellow wallpaper also dwells on the theme of insanity and mental depression. The narrator is a woman who lives with her husband in a house which she severely loathes. The house scares her and she constantly thinks of ghosts and other superstitious creatures. She is, however unable to tell her husband since she is afraid of him. The story is set at a time in England when women were completely submissive to their husbands and even have no opinions. Women in this era are second class citizens and the gender roles are distinct. Women always play second fiddle and have rather passive roles in the family. Women are kept in a state of childish ignorance that

The mental constraints placed on the narrator drive her into mental depression. For instance, John forbids her from writing or expressing herself intellectually. Since writing was her only way of releasing mental pressure, the narrator gradually goes bananas. Other problems that weigh her down include the ugly, yellow wallpaper in her house. The writer has pleaded severally with John to repaint the house but he blatantly refuses.