**Principles for Stating Theme**

1. There is no set method of determining theme. Sometimes a theme may be identified by examining (a) the way in which the main character has changed or what he or she has learned, (b) the nature of the central conflict.
2. Theme must be expressed in the form of a statement (a sentence or several sentences). Terms such as “risk-taking” or phrases such as “appearance versus reality” are *topics*, not themes. The theme is the author’s **idea** about the *topic*.
3. A theme is a **generalization** about life, NOT about the individual characters in the text. Instead, words like people, individual, and someone are useful when writing theme statements.

* A theme should not be so general, however, that it lacks a point. For example, the statement “The effects of risk-taking can be positive or negative” is so broad that it says very little. This statement may be improved by making it more specific, for example, “When an individual takes calculated risks, he or she experiences excitement and grows as an individual.”
* To avoid generalizations, ask questions. For example, “In the text, what are the positive effects of risk-taking?” “What are the negative effects of risk-taking?” “Why is risk-taking positive?” “Why is risk-taking negative?”

1. The theme must account for **all** of the major details in the story. Specific details may be listed to support the theme, even though they are NOT part of the theme statement.
2. Avoid absolutes and sweeping generalizations. Words like *all, every, always* and *never* should be avoided. Instead, try to use such words and phrases as usually, sometimes, frequently, most of the time, often and hardly ever.
3. The theme should not be reduced to a cliché. For example, avoid such trite statements as “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”
4. A well-written text usually has more than one topic and more than one theme.
5. It is useful to mention the title and author of a text in a theme statement. For example, “In [title], [author’s full name] develops the idea that ….”