

What's Theme Mean?

There are two general ways people talk about theme. One way considers theme a subject or a topic. This approach often refers to themes using single words, like “death”, “love”, “inhumanity”, etc. The other way looks at theme not as a subject, but as a perspective – a way of looking at the world. Often in literary analysis it involves the reader’s interpretation of a perspective put forth by the author. We can get at such interpretations by asking, “What is the author saying about the way the world works or should work?” For our purposes, we will always be interested in this latter approach. *When we discuss theme, it should always be a statement, a full sentence, rather than a single-word subject.*

Let’s play around with expanding some single-word subjects into more elaborate “Interpretive Themes” below. Some suggestions have been provided for the first two. As you view *West Wing: Two Cathedrals*, see if you can discover others. Remember, just come up with your own statement for what you think the writer is saying about the way the world works or should work. Of course, the fun begins when you get to defend your interpretation. Have fun. Think hard.

Single Word Theme
(Boo! Hiss! No!)

Interpretive Theme
(Cool. Intelligent. Groovy? Full Sentence!!!)

Power

Attempts to preserve power can have devastating effects

Death

It is better to celebrate the life than to mourn the death.

Truth

Justice

Friendship

Loyalty

Religion

Fathers

Politics
