

Explicit vs. Implicit Themes

Reminder...

- Theme:
 - main idea or statement a work seems to be making about the subject matter
 - But is not the same as subject matter
 - usually a general statement, not specific description or detailing
 - concerns universal ideas (love, hate, betrayal, fear, joy, change, friendship, family, society, etc.)

Explicit!

- Stated or expressed clearly in detail
 - No room for confusion
- Explicit Theme: A theme that is clearly expressed or stated in detail at some point in narrative

Example of Explicit Theme

- Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Wakefield" (1835)
- Story begins as narrator remembers article in newspaper: man leaves wife for 20 years and then returns.
- Narrator gives reader a choice:
 - Can think on situation on their own
 - Can "ramble" through the rest to the message he got from it, "done up neatly, and condensed into final sentence"

Example of Explicit Theme cont.

- During the story, narrator makes general statements about human interactions
 - Wakefield didn't know how insignificant he was in the world
 - It is dangerous to create a hole in a loved one's heart: not because it will always be a hole, but because it can quickly close again

Example of Explicit Theme cont.

- Final Sentence paraphrased (which narrator identified as theme):
 - Individuals adjust to systems of interaction
 - By stepping outside that system, humans run the risk of losing their place in that system forever
 - Risk becoming Outcast of the Universe (like Wakefield)

Implicit

- Opposite of Explicit: Implied
- Details hint at it, but do not clearly express it
- Implicit Theme: a theme that is implied through
 - Characters, Plot, Setting, Stylistic Choices

Example of Implicit Theme

- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831)
- Implicit Theme: Language, reading and writing lead to self-discovery and knowledge.
- Narrators make several general statements about the importance of language, writing, or reading throughout text

Example of Implicit Theme cont.

- Details that hint towards implied theme:
 - Books, letters, diaries, and manuscripts are included, referenced, and alluded to throughout the book
 - Creature learns to read, and reads about own creation in Victor's diary (compares to other creation stories he has read/heard)
 - Creature leaves notes engraved on trees and rocks for Victor

Some texts include both explicit and implicit themes

- Explicit Theme in *Frankenstein*: pursuit of forbidden knowledge leads to destruction
 - Full title: *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus*
 - Prometheus stole fire from Gods and gave to man before banishment
 - Victor stole ability to create life from God before everyone around him is destroyed, leaving him alone (which he shouts to himself in frustration)