

Tips for Identifying Theme in a Play:

Because theme emerges from a work in its entirety and from all the other elements working together, there's no one-size-fits-all method for discovering theme. Here, however, are some things to look for and consider as you read and re-read a play:

1. Pay attention to the title. A title will seldom indicate a play's theme directly, but some titles do suggest a central topic or a key question. Probe the rest of the play to see what insights, if any, about that topic or answers to that question it ultimately seems to offer.
2. Identify any statements that the characters make about a general concept, issue or topic such as human nature, the natural world, and so on, particularly in monologues or in debates between major characters. Look, too, for statements that potentially have a general meaning or application beyond the play, even if they refer to a specific situation. Then consider whether and how the play as a whole corroborates or complicates that insight.
3. Identify a conflict depicted in the play and state it in general terms or turn it into a general question, leaving out any reference to specific characters, setting and so on. Then think about the insight or theme that might be implied by the way the conflict is resolved.