

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**theme:** an underlying message about life or human nature that the writer shares with the reader

**stated theme:** a message that is stated directly or is immediately obvious to the reader

**implied theme:** a message that is not stated and must be inferred by the reader

**recurring theme:** a theme that can be found in different texts, often of the same time period or culture

**universal theme:** a theme that is found throughout all of literature, in different cultures and in different time periods

## HERE'S HOW

**Step 1: Identify the subject.** Ask yourself: What is the topic of this work?

**Step 2: Identify stated themes.** Ask yourself: Does the writer give a direct message to readers through stated opinions or judgments about the subject?

**Step 3: Identify implied themes.** For short stories and novels, ask yourself:

- **Characters:** What are their key traits? How do they change during the story? What important statements do they make?
- **Plot and Conflict:** How is the conflict resolved?
- **Title:** Does the title highlight an important idea, event, or character?

For poems, jot down words and phrases that fit the following categories:

- **Word choice, imagery, repetition**
- **Metaphors and other types of figurative language**
- **Questions asked by the speaker**
- **Direct statements in which the speaker addresses the reader**

**Step 4: Write a theme statement.** Use information from your analysis to write a complete statement about the subject.

**Step 5: Compare and contrast themes.** Examine the way similar themes are treated in different texts. Ask yourself:

- How is the message delivered in each work?
- How does the message vary work to work?
- Can one theme statement apply to *both* texts?
- Are the texts examples of **recurring themes** in a culture or by an author?
- Are the texts examples of **universal themes** throughout history?

**The Rose and the Amaranth\***

A Rose and an Amaranth blossomed side by side in a garden, and the Amaranth said to her neighbor, "How I envy you your beauty and your sweet scent! No wonder you are such a universal favorite." But the Rose replied with a shade of sadness in her voice, "Ah, my dear friend, I bloom but for a time: My petals soon wither and fall, and then I die. But your flowers never fade, even if they are cut; for they are everlasting."

GREATNESS CARRIES ITS OWN PENALTIES.

—Aesop (Greece, 6th century BC)

\* **amaranth**: an imaginary flower that never fades

**Ozymandias of Egypt**

I MET a traveller from an antique land  
 Who said:—Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
 Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,  
 Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown  
 5 And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command  
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
 Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,  
 The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed.  
 And on the pedestal these words appear:  
 10 "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
 Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"  
 Nothing beside remains: round the decay  
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley (Great Britain, 1792-1822)

**Chicago Poet**

I saluted a nobody.  
 I saw him in a looking-glass.  
 He smiled—so did I.  
 He crumpled the skin on his forehead,  
 5 Frowning—so did I.  
 Everything I did he did.  
 I said “Hello, I know you.”  
 And I was a liar to say so.

Ah, this looking-glass man!  
 10 Liar, fool, dreamer, play-actor,  
 Soldier, dusty drinker of dust—  
 Ah! he will go with me  
 Down the dark stairway  
 When nobody else is looking  
 15 When everybody else is gone.

He locks his elbow in mine,  
 I lose all—but not him.

—Carl Sandburg (American, 1878-1967)

**I'm Nobody! Who are You?**

I'm Nobody! Who are you?  
 Are you—Nobody—Too?  
 Then there's a pair of us!  
 Don't tell! they'd advertise—you know!  
 5 How dreary—to be—Somebody!  
 How public—like a Frog—  
 To tell one's name—the livelong June—  
 To an admiring Bog!

—Emily Dickinson (American, 1830-1886)

**Directions:** Read each poem on the **Practice Model**. Then circle the letter of the answer that *best* completes each sentence below.

1. The subject of "Chicago Poet" is—
  - a. rejection
  - b. identity
  - c. aging
  - d. lying
  
2. The subject of "I'm Nobody! Who are You?" is—
  - a. being anonymous vs. famous
  - b. frogs
  - c. seasons
  - d. bogs
  
3. In "I'm Nobody! Who are You?," what word best describes the speaker's feelings about being important?
  - a. June
  - b. advertise
  - c. dreary
  - d. admiring
  
4. The stated theme of "I'm Nobody! Who are You?" is—
  - a. "How dreary—to be—Somebody!"
  - b. "I'm Nobody! Who are you?"
  - c. "Are you—Nobody—Too?"
  - d. "Don't tell! they'd advertise—you know!"
  
5. In "Chicago Poet," what is the central image?
  - a. skin
  - b. dust
  - c. a reflection in a mirror
  - d. dark stairways
  
6. In the last line of "Chicago Poet," what does the speaker mean?
  - a. People need friends.
  - b. Cling to your real self.
  - c. Debt swallows people.
  - d. You never walk alone.
  
7. "Chicago Poet" *and* "I'm Nobody! Who are You?"—
  - a. share a *recurring* theme about fame, identity, and the importance of being yourself
  - b. share a *universal* theme about fame, identity, and the importance of being yourself
  - c. share a universal theme about speaking and being silent
  - d. are thematically unrelated

**Directions:** Read each poem on the **Practice Model**. Then use the poems to answer the questions.

1. In "I'm Nobody! Who are You?," what is the speaker's chief trait?

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2. In "Chicago Poet," what conflict does the speaker have?

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3. In what way are *both* speakers the same?

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4. Write a theme statement that fits *both* poems.

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5. Do you consider the themes for these poems to be universal or recurring? Explain.

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