Identifying Theme

Like I said in the writing theme guide, different people will tell you different things about theme. The truth is that even for professionals, this is a hard thing to define and to add to your writing. So, anything I share with you about theme may be directly disagreed with by other teachers and writers. Just know that I’m right because I am me, and I am great. End of discussion. Here’s what you need to know to find the theme in what you are reading:

1. Define theme: Remember, the theme is the truth about the world the writer is trying to present to the reader. It can be a lesson or message, but not always. Usually it is just something the writer notices but doesn’t judge.

2. Infer: In order to identify a theme, you will have to make some educated guesses. The writer does not usually come right out and tell you the theme of their story. That would be insulting to the reader AND the story, and that is lame. Instead, you will need to think about what the characters did and how they changed. Knowing these things will help you to see what is most important in the story, enabling you to identify the theme. You may want to analyze the symbolism in the text. This usually points right to the theme.

3. One Sentence: Take what you’ve determined to be the most important idea or concept of the book and write it in a sentence. It should not be a lesson (usually) or a moral. Instead, it will be the idea or truth this book is presenting. This one sentence is the theme of the text.

If you follow these steps, you will have no trouble finding the theme. Just remember that this is just a truth or idea about the world the author is showing you. It passes no judgement. One last thing, there can be more than one theme, so keep those eyes peeled.

If you keep all this in mind, you will have no trouble finding the themes of all you read.