Big Idea Words: Creating Theme Statements

These “Great Ideas” appear in many of the texts we read in class.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Animal | Education | Immortality | Philosophy | Will |
| Aristocracy | Emotion | Judgment | Progress | Wisdom |
| Art | Equality | Justice | Punishment |  |
| Beauty | Eternity | Knowledge | Reasoning |  |
| Being | Evolution | Labor | Religion |  |
| Cause | Experience | Language | Revolution |  |
| Chance | Family | Law | Sin |  |
| Change | Fate | Liberty | Slavery |  |
| Citizen | God | Life and Death | Soul |  |
| Constitution | Good and Evil | Logic | Theology |  |
| Courage | Government | Love | Time |  |
| Convention | Habit | Man | Truth |  |
| Democracy | Happiness | Memory | Tyranny |  |
| Desire | History | Mind | War and Peace |  |
| Duty | Honor | Nature | Wealth |  |

The ideas about can be used to make a theme statement. Read the stanza below from Maya Angelou’s “Still I Rise.”

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

A “Great Idea” that can be seen in this stanza is “Courage.” Regardless of the speaker being treated badly by the subject, she states that she will still overcome the adversity. Using the word courage, we can write a thesis statement like below:

“Courage can enable a person to overcome even the most debilitating struggles.”

***OR***

“When faced with mistreatment from others, one must rely on courage and strength to continue on with confidence.”

A theme ***is not one word***, but ***is a complete statement*** that can be applied to many different works. It is a complete sentence that makes an assertion about society and/or humanity.

* A theme is NOT a cliché such as “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”