

Academic Vocabulary for Collection 4

These are the terms you should know
as you read and analyze the selections in this collection.

Subject The topic of a work of literature. The subject can usually be stated in a single word or phrase, such as *love, war, childhood, growing up, aging*.

Theme The general idea or insight about human life that a work of literature reveals. The theme can be stated in one or more sentences. A theme on the subject of love might be: *True love survives all obstacles*. A theme on the subject of war might be: *War destroys the good along with the bad*.



Generalization A broad statement that applies to many individuals, experiences, situations, or observations. A generalization is a kind of conclusion that is drawn after considering as many facts as possible. Themes are expressed as generalizations.

Genres The different forms of literature. Genres include short stories, novels, plays, and poems.

Universal themes Themes that can be found in literature from different times, countries, and cultures. Universal themes cross genres as well as national boundaries, languages, customs, and historic periods. An example of a universal theme is: *A hero often must sacrifice something precious in order to reach a goal*.

Conflict A struggle between opposing characters or opposing forces. In an **external conflict**, a character struggles against an opposing force such as another character, society as a whole, or a force of nature. An **internal conflict** takes place within a character's own mind. It is a struggle between opposing needs, desires, or emotions.



For Further Information . . .

Be sure to read these essays in *Elements of Literature*:

- **Theme**, pages 246–247.
- **Comparing Universal Themes**, page 260.
- **Comparing a Theme Across Genres**, page 294.