

#### 04. Key Features of Prose Fiction: Theme

**Please note the differences between the types of prose fiction, which are all governed by length:**

**Novels:** Multi-chapter narratives without any specific length requirements or restrictions.

**Novellas:** Multi-chapter narratives which are shorter than novels, typically averaging between 100 and 150 pages.

**Short Stories:** Very short narratives, typically not longer than one or two chapters.

**Flash Fiction:** Extremely short works of fiction that average around 100 words.

**N.B.!** As per your course requirements for this module, you will not be expected to analyse anything more than an extract from a novel, novella or short story.

**N.N.B.!!** Remember to focus your analyses on the passages presented to you **only!** Even if you are familiar with the novel the passage comes from, make sure that your work focuses only on the information in the passage, as that is what you are being tested on.

**N.N.N.B.!!!** **Theme** is the **most important feature** of prose fiction, as it is the **primary reason** why we conduct **critical analysis**. By **understanding** the **themes** of a text, we understand what the **purpose or message of the text** is. Much of your **critical analysis** will **focus** on **identifying** the **themes** in a passage and then **explaining** to your **reader** how the **author uses language** to **create** these **themes**. This is how you explain what the passage **means to you** with proof. **Without substantiation**, you are merely **expressing an opinion**, but with **sufficient substantiation**, you are **unveiling a truth!**

#### **Theme:**

**Definition:** The central topics or ideas that can be found in a story.

These topics and ideas are often woven throughout the plot. These **themes** can be based on almost anything, although often theme is linked to human existence and identity.

- Emotions (such as love and hate)
- Social (gender and relationships)
- Economic issues (ownership and production)
- Political (conflict and globalism)
- Environmental (eco-politics and veganism)

- Physical (Body issues)
- Metaphysical (questions of existence)

Such examples as the ones above provide a broad base on which you may consider the notion of theme. If you consider the topics above, you may see that they overlap. Themes can merge and blend together, providing support and opposition within a text and ultimately adding a level of complexity to the text, which will often influence what the reader understands the text to be about.

Longer, more complex texts tend to have the space to include many complex themes and ideas, while shorter texts, such as short stories and flash fiction will generally only contain one or two themes, at the most.

Everyone can interpret a text differently in literature, which brings us neatly to the importance of theme, in terms of **critical analysis**. The themes of a text are what **lie at the heart of a text** – they are the ideas we get from a text when we interpret it. **Thus, they are the goal of critical analysis.**

However, because each reader can interpret a text their own way (**subjectively**), it becomes necessary, within literary studies, to **substantiate or support** any interpretation of the text through a **close reading** of the text as well as, if needed, secondary readings. If you do not argue for your interpretation through close readings, then the actual analysis becomes problematic, as there is insufficient evidence to support your arguments.