

## Literary Terms #9 – Theme/Moral/Motif

- I. **Theme** – a theme is a universal truth, a concept, an overarching idea or a topic that the story is based upon.  
Examples: Truth, Honor, Respect, Love, Revenge, Isolation, Fear of Death
  - A. Theme is rarely stated but must be understood by the reader.
  - B. Themes can be detected at various points throughout a story
    1. **Recurring** theme is one which will appear more than once in the story
    2. **Universal** theme is one which appeals to all people in all forms of literature.
- II. **Moral** – this is the lesson taught in the story. It usually occurs at the end of the story and would be stated as a sentence. The moral is the message the author wishes to convey to the reader and may do so directly or implied.  
Examples: Be happy with what you have.  
Slow and steady wins the race.
  - A. While there can be many themes running thru a story, there will only be one moral.
- III. **Motif** - a recurring element, object, or idea in a story which has a symbolic value and will enhance the theme. To use the same element over and over again will reinforce a theme. *Not every story will use a motif.*  
Example: Prince Charming, beautiful maidens, wicked step mothers, happy endings – all these are examples of motifs in fairy tales.
- IV. **Symbol** – something used to represent something else. For example, a ring symbolizes eternity and love.
- V. **Gothic** - The term Gothic fiction refers to a style of writing that is characterized by elements of fear, horror, death, and gloom which bring about intense emotions. These emotions can include fear and suspense. Gothic tales all have those characteristics of darkness, suffering, and even death.

While Poe is undoubtedly the best known of the Gothic authors, he is certainly not the only one.

A. Common Characteristics:

- **Gloomy**, decaying setting (haunted houses or castles with secret passages, trapdoors, and other mysterious architecture), dark forests, cemeteries, etc.
- Supernatural beings or monsters (ghosts, vampires, zombies, giants)
- Curses or prophecies.
- Intense emotions.