

HOW TO DEVELOP A

THEME

www.jillwilliamson.com/helps

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the website www.jillwilliamson.com/helps. The browser's address bar and tabs are visible at the top. The website's navigation menu is highlighted in a light beige color and includes links for HOME, ABOUT, BOOKS, BLOG, FOLLOW ME, and a yellow box. A large red arrow points from the top right towards this yellow box. Below the navigation menu, the website features a dark red banner with the text "Join my newsletter" and a "Learn More" link. The main content area displays the author's name "Jill Williamson" in a cursive font, followed by the tagline "JOIN THE ADVENTURE". The primary article title is "Brainstorming Worksheets for Writers". Below the title, a paragraph states: "For you visual learners, here are some worksheets to help you brainstorm your stories. Many of these were included in the back of my *Go Teen Writers* and *Storyworld First* books." A list of resources follows, including "ONE YEAR ADVENTURE NOVEL RESOURCES" and "Civilization Worksheet". On the right side, there is a "Subscribe to My Newsletter" form with fields for "Email" (containing "you@example.com") and "First Name". The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 11:30 AM on 6/27/2022 and the temperature as 81°F.

WHAT STORIES CHANGED YOUR LIFE?



WHAT IS THE THEME OF THIS STORY?



STORIES THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

(Other than the Bible)

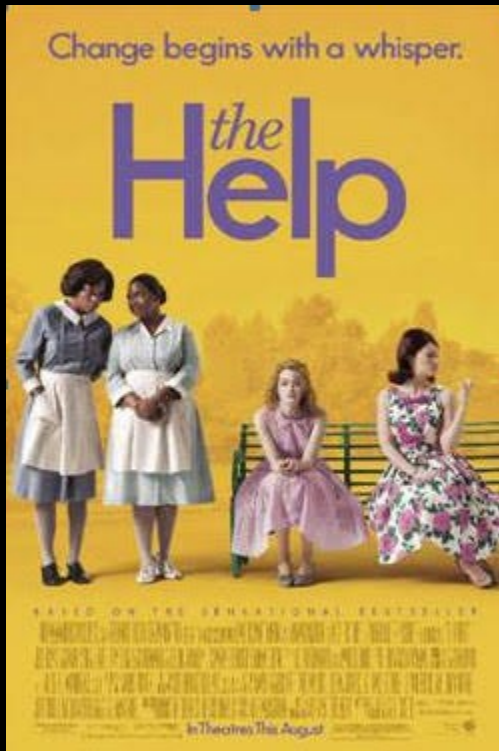
- The Nancy Drew series by Carolyn Keene
- This Present Darkness* by Frank Peretti
- The Street Lawyer* by John Grisham
- No Compromise: The Life Story of Keith Green* by Melody Green
- The Last Battle* by C. S. Lewis
- Tilly* by Frank Peretti
- Harry Potter series
- Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson
- Angel Eyes* by Shannon Dittimore



What stories changed you?
How and why?

WHAT IS THEME?

What your story says about life and humanity.



THEME CAN . . .

Illustrate a universal truth.

- After sunshine comes the storm.
- What goes around, comes around.
- A penny saved is a penny earned.
- You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.
- All that glitters is not gold.
- Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

THEME CAN . . .

Reveal the human condition.

– *Les Miserables*

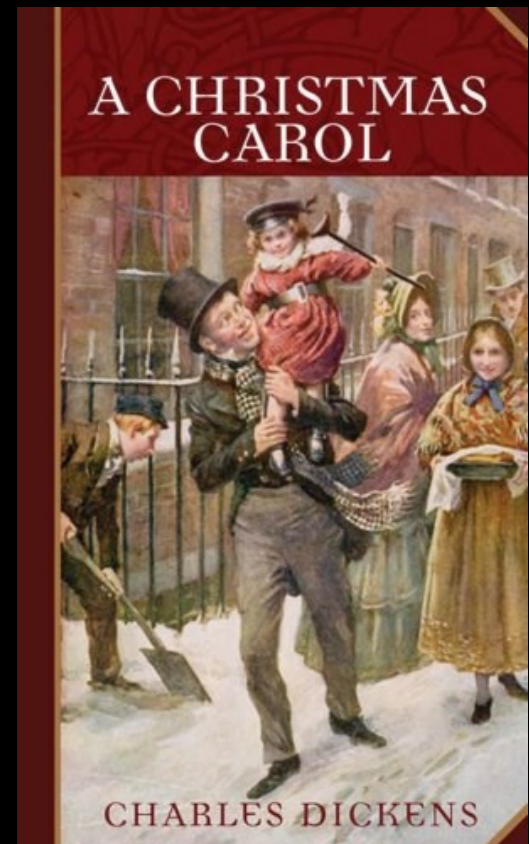
Social injustice, clash of classes, human rights

– *A Christmas Carol*

Greed, classes, learning to love others unselfishly

– *Sense and Sensibility*

How should a lady behave in relationships: emotional vs. rational, clash of classes



THEME CAN . . .

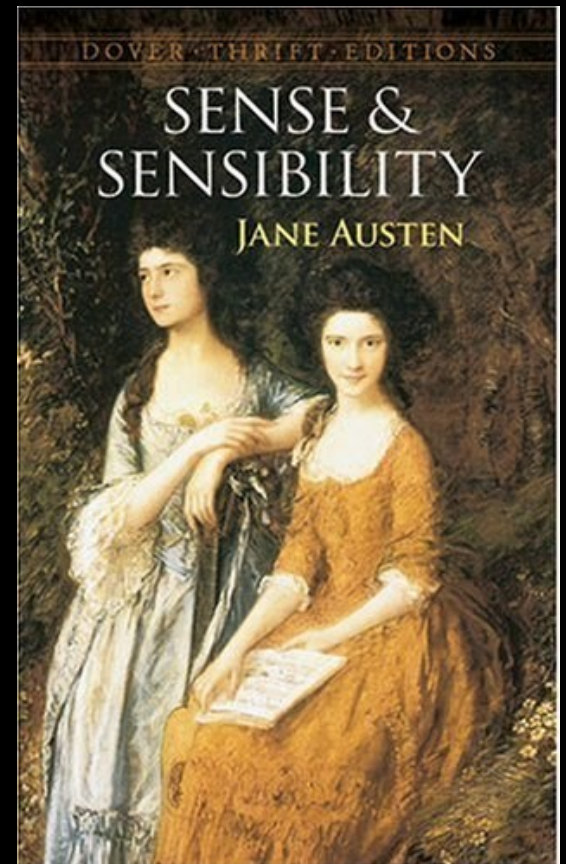
Inspire readers to a higher level of humanity.

- *Les Miserables*
- *A Christmas Carol*
- *Sense and Sensibility*

MARIANNE: [Speaking of Willoughby] If his present regrets are half as painful as mine, he will suffer enough.

ELINOR: Do you compare your conduct with his?

MARIANNE: No. I compare it with what it ought to have been. I compare it with yours.



THEME CAN . . .

Appear as allegory.

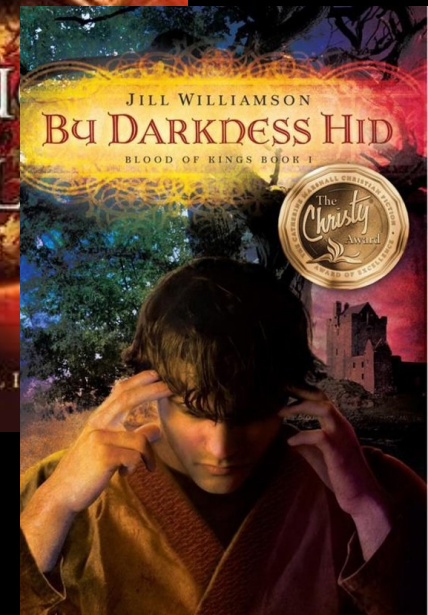
- *The Pilgrim's Progress*
- *Animal Farm*
- *The Wizard of Oz*
- *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*



THEME CAN . . .

Speak to a specific issue.

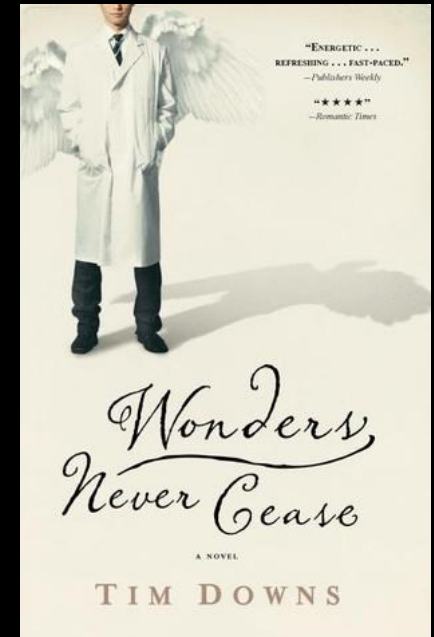
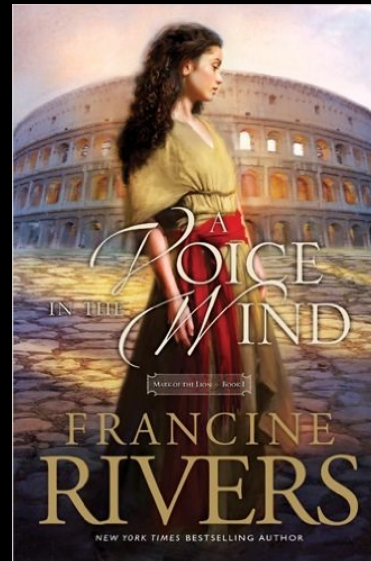
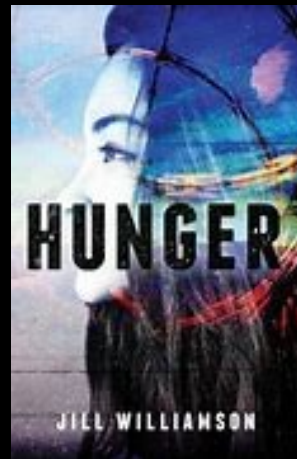
- “War” → “War is bad” or “War is a necessary evil”
- “Judgement” → “Does not always equal justice”
- “Freedom vs. Slavery” →
“Our own choices can lead to freedom or slavery”
- “Darkness” → “Darkness grows if people feed it.”



THEME CAN . . .

Ask a question.

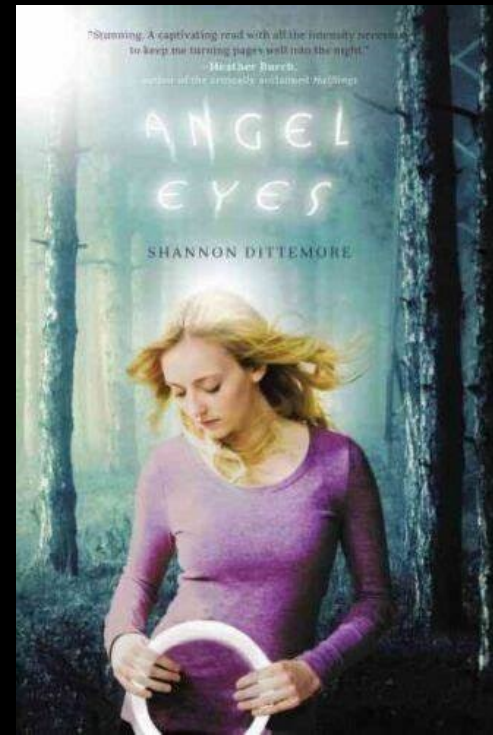
- “Are angels real?”
- Francine Rivers . . .
- “Is water a right or a possession?”



WAYS TO WORK IN THEME

Sometimes a story idea comes to you with a theme attached:

Once you've seen, you can't unsee.

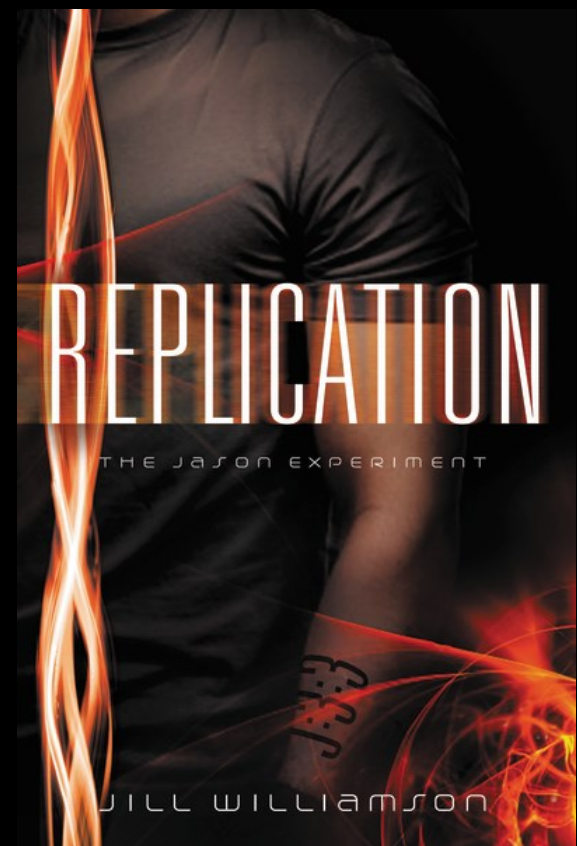


Patience: Sometimes the theme comes to you as you write your first draft.

Wait and see what unfolds.

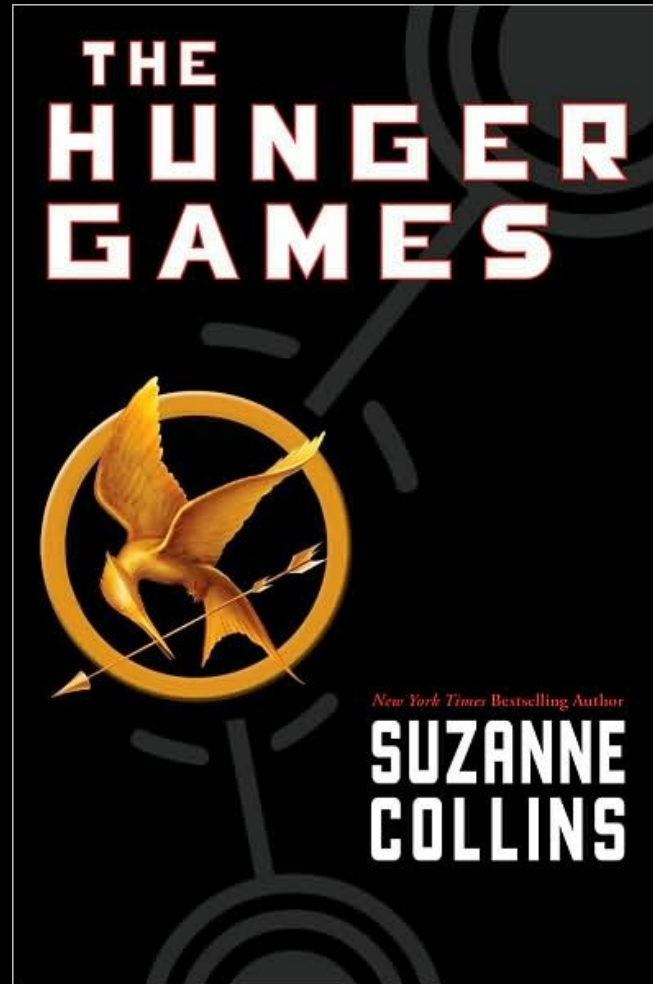
For Example: *Replication*

- Martyr's name
- Purpose
- Clones are people too.



WORK IN THEME THROUGH . . .

Plot



WORK IN THEME THROUGH . . .

Character growth

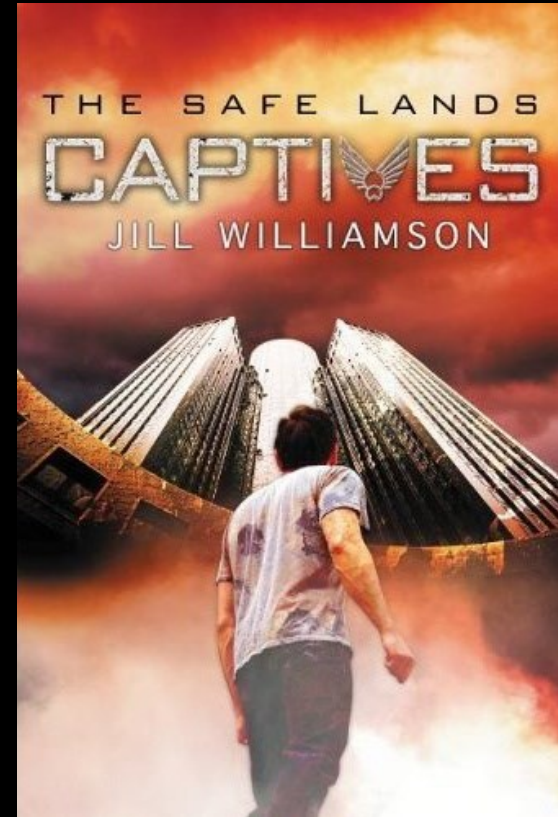
- Theme Stated
- Six Things That Need Fixing



WORK IN THEME THROUGH . . .

Symbolism

- “Find pleasure in life!”
- Mockingjay



WORK IN THEME THROUGH . . .

Your Title

- *Pride and Prejudice*
- *To Kill A Mockingbird*
- *Running Lean*
- *Uglies*
- *Saving Private Ryan*
- *Captives, Rebels, Outcasts*
- *By Darkness Hid*, etc



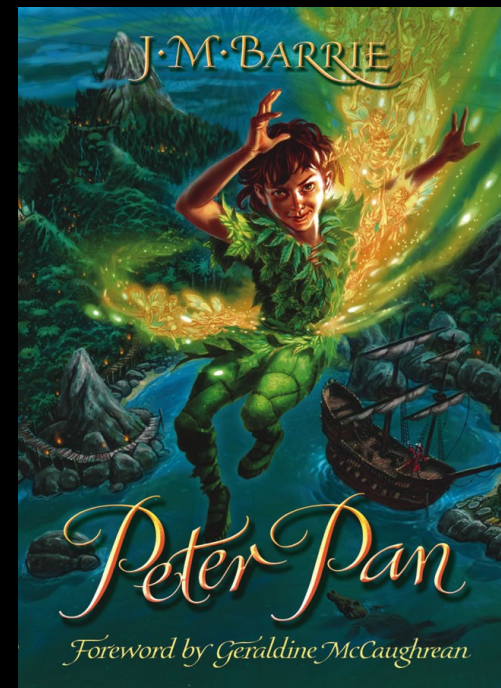
If you've finished your
first draft and you've
neglected your theme,
DON'T WORRY.

Now is the time to
dig it out.

Now is the time to
dig it out.
But. How?

What lie does your character believe?

“It was because I heard father and mother talking about what I was to be when I became a man. I don’t want ever to be a man. I want always to be a little boy and to have fun.”



Is there a task only your character can accomplish?

With great power comes great responsibility.



Is there a task only your character can accomplish?

“... when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward.”



What are you, THE AUTHOR, trying to say?

- Heaven is a real place.
- No one is beyond redemption.
- Comfort keeps us from our destiny.
- We need others.
- War makes monsters of us all.
- Even a small light shatters the darkness.
- Power corrupts.
- Love is worth fighting for.

A Warning on Theme . . .

-Theme is subtle!

A Warning on Theme . . .

- Theme is subtle!

- Don't over-think it

- Don't force it

- Don't preach

- Stay true to your characters

- Break it up like backstory or planting a mystery

- Tweak it in the rewrite stage

www.jillwilliamson.com/helps

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying `jillwilliamson.com/helps/`. The browser's address bar and tabs are visible at the top. Below the browser window, a red arrow points to a yellow box in the navigation menu. The navigation menu includes links for HOME, ABOUT, BOOKS, BLOG, FOLLOW ME, and BOOKS. Below the navigation menu, the website's logo is displayed: *Jill Williamson* JOIN THE ADVENTURE. The main content area features the title "Brainstorming Worksheets for Writers" and a paragraph of text: "For you visual learners, here are some worksheets to help you brainstorm your stories. Many of these were included in the back of my *Go Teen Writers* and *Storyworld First* books." Below this text, there are several links: "ONE YEAR ADVENTURE NOVEL RESOURCES", "Civilization Worksheet", "Weaving in Theme slides", and "How to Edit Your Novel slides (On the GTW Blog)". On the right side of the page, there is a "Subscribe to My Newsletter" form with fields for "Email" (containing "you@example.com") and "First Name". The Windows taskbar is visible at the bottom of the screen, showing the time as 11:30 AM on 6/27/2022.

Questions?

