

Richard Cory by Edwin Arlington Robinson

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.
And he was always quietly **arrayed**,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he **fluttered** pulses when he said,
“Good-morning,” and he glittered when he walked.
And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.
So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

Recognizing Theme The **theme** of a piece of writing is an idea that states a general truth about life or an insight into human nature. The theme is usually not stated directly. Readers have to analyze all the events and look for supporting details in order to decide for themselves what the theme is. Some stories or poems have more than one theme.

Reread the lines “We people on the pavement . . .” and “. . . wish that we were in his place.” This shows that the ordinary people on the street admired Richard Cory and wished that they were in his place. These lines support one theme of the poem—that people often want to be something they are not.

1. Which line also supports the theme that people often want to be something they are not?
 - a. And he was always human when he talked;
 - b. In fine, we thought that he was everything. . .
 - c. Went home and put a bullet through his head.
2. Another theme in this poem could be that wealth or money doesn't necessarily make a person happy. What detail supports this theme?
 - a. Richard Cory was richer than a king and schooled in every grace.
 - b. Even though Richard Cory seemed to have everything, he killed himself.
 - c. Richard Cory glittered when he walked.

The Taxi by Amy Lowell

When I go away from you
The world beats dead
Like a **slackened** drum.

I call out for you against the **juted** stars
And shout into the ridges of the wind.

Streets coming fast,
One after the other,

Wedge you away from me,

And the lamps of the city prick my eyes

So that I can no longer see your face.

Why should I leave you,

To wound myself upon the sharp edges of the night?

Recognizing Theme The **theme** of a poem is the most important idea the poet is trying to express in the poem. It is the underlying meaning of the poem. To find the theme, ask yourself "What is the most important idea in this poem?"

The theme is different from the topic of the poem. The topic of a poem might be love or war, for example, but the theme would be a more specific idea, such as "It is human nature to love." The theme of a poem is usually not stated directly. You might have to figure out the theme by putting together all the different ideas in the poem to see what they have in common.

You can find clues to the theme in the poet's choice of words, the rhythm, the length of the lines, in fact, in everything about the poem. Look at the poem's title, the poet's observations, and the objects in the poem. When you decide what you think the theme is, make sure that it is true for the whole poem and not just part of it.

1. What is the topic of this poem?
 - a. taking a taxi ride through the city at night
 - b. taking a taxi ride away from a loved one
2. What is the theme of the poem?
 - a. It is painful to be separated from a loved one.
 - b. Nights can be lonely and uncomfortable, especially in a taxi.
 - c. It's hard to maintain relationships in a city.