Theme

* All literature is written for a purpose. Some fiction (most popular fiction) is only meant to entertain the reader; however, literature’s purpose is to reveal a truth about life. Theme is what separates *Twilight* from *Dracula* or an Eric Jerome Dickey novel from one of Toni Morrison’s. Theme is the central message of the piece or generalization that can be made based on the text. There can be more than one theme within a text.
* Theme is not the moral of the story. For example, there is no moral to *Night*, but there are themes such as there is no god in the world and human life is full of depravity and darkness. Weisel did not write that to teach us to be kind to each other, but to share a human experience.
* You do not have to agree with the theme of a novel. Themes can go against every belief you hold. But, if there is evidence in the text that it exists, it does.
* Theme should be able to be expressed in a sentence. Instead of saying that the theme is godlessness, you should say that Wiesel expresses that religion is a myth because there can be no god in a world full of depravity and suffering.
* The theme should be a generalization. Notice that I did not refer to the Holocaust in the above statement. I could apply that theme to several novels because it is generalized.
* Avoid terms such as all, every, always, etc. Do not make a blanket statement.
* You must be able to prove theme. Use the text and those previous literary elements to derive the theme.
* Do not use a cliché to express theme. “Love is blind” is not a theme. It’s a cliché.

Assignments:

1. Choose ten of the past stories we have read and create index cards where the theme statement is on the front (In Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes*, the theme free will dictates a person’s life is evident in characterization and symbolism.) and five examples of textual evidence is on the back.
2. For one of the above stories, write a 250-word essay in which you prove theme.