

Knight's Tale (Standards Focus: Theme)

Theme is the central idea or message in a work of literature. Because theme is so important to a piece of literature, the title, plot, characters, setting, and mood all creatively work together to create a message from the author to the reader. There can be one major theme in a work, or the novel can have several underlying themes.

Part One

Directions: *The prompts in this section ask you to think about the theme of love and marriage in the context of both modern day and the 13th Century. Answer each question fully on a separate piece of paper. You may work with a partner or in a small group if your teacher allows.*

1. Think about images of love and marriage in today's society. Identify and describe different images or symbols of love and marriage from TV, movies, books, and other sources within society. In other words, when you think of the "ideal" of love and/or marriage, who or what do you think of? Is the ideal of love different from the ideal of marriage? Explain.
2. Summarize the connection between love and marriage as it appears in current society.
3. If you research the story of Hippolyta and Theseus, you will find different variations. The one Chaucer uses states that Theseus battled the Amazons and took Queen Hippolyta to be his wife. Using this version of the story, what is the reason for the marriage?
4. Clearly the marriage between Theseus and Hippolyta was not created for love and yet the Knight says there was great feasting after the wedding. In fact, Theseus rebukes the women in black for trying to ruin his party. Think about this situation from Hippolyta's point of view and write an entry in her diary or a letter she would write to a friend about her experiences.
5. The two princes, Arcite and Palamon, are taken prisoner and condemned to spend the rest of their days in Theseus' prison. While in prison, they see Emily, sister of Hippolyta. Both immediately fall in love with her. There are references to "serving her" and yet she does not know they exist because there are no interactions between her and either prince. Despite her lack of involvement in either relationship, both princes claim her and agree to fight to the death for her hand. Identify the underlying assumptions about the role of women in love and marriage in this story.
6. How does the reader learn of Emily's thoughts about marriage with either Arcite or Palamon?
7. Compare Hippolyta's marriage to Theseus with Emily's marriages to Arcite and Palamon.

Part Two

Directions: *For Part Two, you will need to use the Internet or your library resources to research Courtly Love, Marriage and Chivalry in the Middle Ages, specifically.*

As you read about courtly love, marriage and chivalry, take notes and write down the source information in the chart below.

Courtly Love

Summary:

Source(s):

Marriage

Summary:

Source(s):

Chivalry

Summary:

Source(s)