**Themes**

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Every literary work must have a reason for having been written.

A writer can write about almost anything.

This is virtually no limit to what a writer can write about. There are exterior events, all those things that happen to people, and there are interior events, the things that happen inside a character’s head. These raw materials can only be turned into fiction, poetry, and drama if they are given form and significance. A literary work can deal with complex events that take place over a long period of time or merely with an intense experience that takes place in a moment.

**-A summary of a literary work cannot convey the full meaning of the whole work.**

**-We can describe what a literary work is about by examining the subject, the theme, the situation, and the plot.**

**-In some poems the stress is on the “statement,” in others, the stress is on “language and form.”**

**\*\*There is enormous variety in literary themes.**

**-Some great themes have appeared frequently in our literary heritage.**

**-Certain major themes have emerged in contemporary literature.**

**-Clarity in literature is arrived at more through descriptions of experience than through statements of ideas.**

**New Autumn, New York**

Late in the day when light is sandwiched softly between slices of daytime and night, I stroll around Gramercy Park, locked as usual and all keyed up again for the real autumn.

To the failing of leaves in time-lapse slow motion, I follow my feet, each crackling step nudging me into a vast present than this friendly seasonal chill can circumscribe.

There is no end to inward adventure of journeying October to the edge of November.

*Source: From Al Young, The Blues Don’t Change: New and Selected Poems. Copyright 1982. Reprinted by Permission of Louisiana State University Press.*

**Warning: Nuclear Waste Dump**

This poem has to last

Ten thousand years

And be translated

Into every language

Into the world

Whoever conquers New Jersey

Must come equipped

With this poem, or die

The poem must not depend

On music for its beauty

Since it must be equally beautiful

In every language

There will ever be

It has to be so beautiful

That people will say it

For five hundred generations

It must be universal

And timeless

Millions of lives depended

On the beauty of this poem

But it cannot change

From ear to ear

The critic who discovers

Its figurative sense

Must be silenced

For the poem means

Exactly what it says

We must find a way

To teach the birds

And the animals

To say it too

And the tree, and water

*Source: From Mary Baine Campbell. The World, the Flesh, and the Angels. Copyright 1989 by Beacon Press. Reprinted by permission of the author.*

**Witness**

*David Ignatow*

We can’t write ourselves into eternal life

And that is the sorrow and waste of writing But those who would write in this knowledge

Have found a subterfuge by which to let

Themselves be prompted, in heady confidence of meaning: the wealth of self

Spread amongst the readers who themselves

Will read for reason of earth:

That they have been witness

To their birth, growth and death

And shared the earth with earth

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1. What is the theme of “New Autumn, New York?

2. What is the theme of “Warning: Nuclear Waste Dump”?

3. What is the theme of the poem “Witness”?