



# Inciting Incident Themes Worksheet

The inciting incident is much more than a story's first major event. It's also *the* launching pad that thrusts a character into the main conflict and sets up the journey that will move that character physically and emotionally from Point A to Point B. And, the way it shakes up the character's world often crackles with literary themes.

If you've ever wondered what themes are reflected in your story's inciting incident – or whether the event demonstrates themes that fit the story – look no further! The **Inciting Incident Themes Worksheet** is the tool you can use to figure out either question. The first two writing activities will guide you in crafting an inciting incident that plays to the protagonist's fears and provokes a strong reaction, while the final exercise asks you to extract possible themes from those brainstorming sessions.

[Click here to read the DIY MFA article on inciting incidents and themes](#) before doing the following activities.

## **Instructions:**

Print out a copy of this worksheet, and (if possible) have a print or electronic version of the inciting incident scene from your WIP available.

Please note that each exercise is featured on a separate page to allow space for your answers and other notes.



# Inciting Incident Themes Worksheet

## 1. Strike Your Character Where It Hurts Most – The Soul

In order for an inciting incident to succeed, it needs to tug at the protagonist's emotions. The most effective inciting incidents threaten a character's home, loved ones, dreams for the future, even his own survival. This will ensure that the character is emotionally invested in the plot's outcome and give him a goal to work toward – and create the perfect environment for themes to grow.

When crafting your inciting incident, consider the protagonist carefully. What does he care about? What is his greatest fear? Does he have a false belief about himself or the world at large? Then, imagine what would happen if the protagonist's worst fear came true, or if he lost the things he cares about most. How would his life change in unexpected or undesirable ways?

**Activity #1:** Take a new story idea or your current WIP, and brainstorm your protagonist's fears, desires, and other values. How would the character's life change in undesirable ways if his worst fear became reality? Or if he lost the people or objects he cherishes most? What kind(s) of inciting incidents could rise out of these scenarios?

Use the blank space below or on the back of this page for your answers.



# Inciting Incident Themes Worksheet

## 2. Force the Protagonist to React to the Inciting Incident

Gauge the protagonist's reaction to the inciting incident. What emotions does he feel? What is he thinking at this moment? These nuances can reveal more layers to the protagonist's dilemma and provide additional insight into possible literary themes.

In some cases, the inciting incident might force the protagonist to make a decision. Don't resist this if it happens in your story. Let the protagonist's emotions, thoughts, and other details guide him (and you) in making that decision and establishing his initial goal. It's still part of the character's reaction, and it can shed even more light on the story's themes.

**Activity #2:** Choose one of the inciting incidents from Activity #1, and free-write about your protagonist's reaction to it. What thoughts, emotions, and physiological responses does he experience? Does he make an immediate decision about his circumstances, or does he postpone it for later? Feel free to answer these questions for the other inciting incidents, too.

Use the blank space below or on the back of the page for your answers.

# Inciting Incident Themes Worksheet

## 3. Deduce Your Story's Themes From There

Review what you've brainstormed so far for your inciting incident. What ideas are touched on through the fears and desires connected to this event? Do other values or concepts arise from the protagonist's reaction? Most of all, what could the protagonist learn because of the journey that has now been launched? Some themes will be easy to spot, so don't be alarmed if you need to think outside the box to find others.

**Activity #3:** Using your answers to Activities #1 and #2, determine the high-level ideas or concepts that rise out of the inciting incident(s). Consider every angle of how the event affects the protagonist, from his fears and dreams to his reaction to the event. List any possible themes you find as a result.

Use the blank space below or on the back of the page for your answers.