

How to Theme: Example Themes

Here are three theme categories that are common in Star Trek and many other stories, along with a selection of representative episodes and the specific themes that apply.

Love and the Romantic Relationship

These are two distinct but related themes. One is about the emotion (love) felt by an individual and what goes on in their head. The other is about human-human interaction and how people embark upon romantic relationships together.



Romantic Love
 ◀ Love
 ◀ Human Emotion
 ◀ The Human Condition



Romantic Relationship
 ◀ Human-Human Interaction
 ◀ Social Interaction
 ◀ The Human Condition

[tos1x28] The City on the Edge of Forever by Harlan Ellison. AD 1967-04-06 (SD 3134.0) After accidentally overdosing on a powerful stimulant McCoy becomes unbalanced and absconds through a newly discovered time portal. He somehow changes the course of history; Kirk and Spock follow him back to the 1930s in order to restore the time-line.

[tos2x02] Metamorphosis by Gene L. Coon. AD 1967-11-10 (SD 3219.4) After crash landing on a remote asteroid, a shuttle crew from the Enterprise are astonished to find a castaway who appears to be Zefram Cochrane – the inventor of warp drive – and his mysterious alien companion.

The first of these is a **tragic love** story. Kirk falls madly in love with a woman who he knows is destined to die young and he is duty-bound not to interfere. The second story features an interspecies romance: a powerful alien energy being falls madly in love with a strapping young human but such a thing cannot possibly be. This is an example of **forbidden love**, love which is not quite accepted by contemporary society.

[tng3x24] Ménage à Troi by Fred Bronson and Susan Sackett. AD 1990-05-28 (SD 43930.7) An infatuated Ferengi Daimon kidnaps Lwaxana Troi with the intention of taking her for his bride.

[tng4x16] Galaxy's Child by Thomas Katozian. AD 1991-03-11 (SD 44614.6) When the Enterprise crew accidentally kills a space whale creature, they must rush to save its unborn offspring. Meanwhile, Geordi meets the real Leah Brahms and finds to his shock that she is nothing like the woman he encountered on the holodeck.

Here are two typical stories of **unrequited love**. In the first, a despicable and ugly Ferengi tries to woo Lwaxana Troi who considers herself far out of his league. The spurned Ferengi resorts to kidnapping but is eventually outwitted. In the second story, the bumbling young bachelor engineer Geordi tries his game on the cold and condescending scientist Leah Brahms. She will have nothing of it and is in fact happily married already; Leah and Geordi part as just friends.

[tng5x06] The Game by Susan Sackett and Fred Bronson and Brannon Braga. AD 1991-10-28 (SD 45208.2) Wesley visits the Enterprise, but finds the crew addicted to a mind-altering computer game.

In this episode Wesley gets a girlfriend, Robin Lefler. There is awkward conversation, shuffling of feet, sneaking off into corners and the stealing of a first kiss. The associated theme is called **teen romance** and may not be suitable for mature audiences.

Past and Present Moral Controversies

Stories are also used to investigate aspects of serious and controversial social issues, some more current than others. Star Trek does not shy away from discussing the pros and cons of genetic engineering, religion, slavery or even Nazi Germany.



Eugenics, Genetic Engineering, Euthanasia...
 ◀ Past and Present Moral Controversies
 ◀ Domestic Social Issue
 ◀ Society

[tos1x12] The Conscience of the King by Barry Trivers. AD 1966-12-08 (SD 2817.6) Kirk suspects a Shakespearean actor may actually be the murderous former governor of Tarsus IV. Kirk invites the acting troupe aboard the Enterprise in order to investigate. Assassination attempts are made on Kirk and another crewman who was an eyewitness to the murders.



Controversy

Love

Existential Risk

[tos1x24] Space Seed by Carey Wilber. AD 1967-02-16 (SD 3141.9) The Enterprise discovers an ancient sleeper-ship which escaped from Earth's Eugenics Wars in the late 20th century. The genetically engineered passengers, led by war criminal Khan Noonien Singh (Khaaaaaan!), seize control of the Enterprise and attempt to destroy the ship.

These stories discuss forms of **eugenics**: practices aimed at improving humans as a race by preventing inferior individuals from reproducing. Such ideas are largely abhorrent to us today but it was not long ago they were taken seriously (the last forced sterilization in the USA was carried out in 1981). In the first story it is revealed that the Governor of Tarsus IV faced a food shortage and chose to let only "the best" people survive. In the second story, selectively bred super-human Khan seeks to annihilate lesser specimens.

[tng2x07] Unnatural Selection by John Mason and Mike Gray. AD 1989-01-30 (SD 42494.8) The Enterprise receives a distress call from the USS Lantree, discovering their crew has apparently died of old age.

[tng3x11] The Hunted by Robin Bernheim. AD 1990-01-08 (SD 43489.2) A genetically modified soldier reveals the social problems of a world hoping to join the Federation.

Here the possible consequences of **genetic engineering** are pondered. In the first story, a disease deadly to non-engineered humans is accidentally created. In the second, designed super-soldiers with social issues go rogue and create much trouble for their government.

[tng4x22] Half a Life by Ted Roberts and Peter Allan Fields. AD 1991-05-06 (SD 44805.3) Lwaxana Troi finally finds love, but discovers her man must undergo a ritualistic suicide.

[tng5x16] Ethics by Sara Charno and Stuart Charno. AD 1992-03-02 (SD 45587.3) When Worf becomes paralyzed in a freak accident, his sense of honor compels him to choose between euthanasia and a risky medical procedure.

In these episodes **euthanasia** (human assisted suicide) is a central theme. In "Half a Life" we see a seclusive alien society in which people at the age of 60 are expected to commit ritual suicide for the benefit of society as a whole. In aptly named "Ethics", Worf becomes paralyzed; without hope of regaining his former mobility he beseeches his friends to help him die.

Existential Risk

Thoughts on how Earth, our civilization or the entire Universe may come to an end is interesting stuff for stories. In Star Trek there are plenty of examples.



Man-made Risk, Alien Invasion, Force Majeure...
 ◀ Existential Risk
 ◀ Alternate Reality

[tos2x26] Assignment: Earth by Gene Roddenberry and Art Wallace. AD 1968-03-29 (SD Unknown) On a historical research mission to 1968, the Enterprise crew encounters Gary Seven, a human from the future who appears to be attempting to alter history.

This episode takes on Earth during the cold war. The United States is about to launch a **nuclear orbital weapons platform**, an event that advanced aliens believe will lead to **nuclear holocaust**. Luckily, the aliens intervene through proxy, Gary Seven, and the project is sabotaged.

[tos3x08] The Empath by Joyce Muskat. AD 1968-12-06 (SD 5121.5) While visiting a doomed planet, Kirk and his landing party are subject to torturous experiments to test the empathy of another race of aliens.

[tos3x23] All Our Yesterdays by Jean Lisette Aroeste. AD 1969-03-14 (SD 5943.7) Kirk, Spock, and McCoy are trapped in the past on a world threatened by a supernova.

These two stories both discuss the possibility of a sun going **supernova**. In the first story the solar system happens to have multiple species, one which is advanced enough to flee and take another species with it. In the second story there is an advanced species that escape into their own past through a time portal. In reality, supernova are thought to occur only about three times per century in the Milky Way so the number of them encountered in Star Trek is conspicuous.

[tng1x25] Conspiracy by Robert Sabaroff. AD 1988-05-09 (SD 41775.5) The strange behavior of high-ranking officers leads Captain Picard to uncover a conspiracy perpetrated by a race of parasitic bug aliens within Starfleet.

[tng3x03] The Survivors by Michael Wagner. AD 1989-10-09 (SD 43152.4) The Enterprise crew investigates the last two survivors of an annihilated world. The entire surface of the planet has been transformed to dust except for the survivors' one little garden and house.

[tng3x26] The Best of Both Worlds by Michael Piller. AD 1990-06-18 (SD 43989.1) Picard is assimilated by the Borg, who begin their invasion of Federation space.

Here are three stories about demise through **attack from outer space**. Supposing we are not alone in the Universe, should we fear other intelligent species? In the first story it is nefarious bug aliens that subvert our leaders by attaching themselves to people's brain stems. In the second, a human colony is wiped out by an invading fleet but the invaders' species in turn get wiped clean out of existence by a transcendent alien with magic-like powers. In the third, the Borg try to invade Earth and turn all humans into cyborgs.