

Grade 5 Playlist: Determine How the Speaker in a Poem Reflects Upon a Topic

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2:

- Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

Welcome

Although poetry is different from fiction, poems are similar to stories because they have topics and themes. Poems also can have action, characters, and challenges. Unlike stories, poems are written in a specific form. They use a speaker in addition to rhythm and rhyme to address a topic. The words that the speaker uses to address the topic help determine the theme.

Objectives

In this playlist, the student will learn and practice how to:

- determine the topic and theme of a poem.
- describe how the speaker of a poem reflects upon the topic.

Review

Key Terms

- The **topic** of a poem is what the poem is about.
- The **theme** of a poem is its central idea or underlying message. The theme is not usually directly stated.

Exploring the Standard

A Closer Look: Determining Topic and Theme

A reader can determine the topic by asking: What is the poem mostly about?

Determine the theme of a poem by:

1. Identifying the main characters.
2. Determining a challenge the main character faces.
3. Looking at how the main character deals with the challenge.
4. Deciding on the lesson that can be learned from how the character deals with the challenge.



Read “Casey at the Bat” by Ernest Lawrence Thayer, and determine the main character and the challenge the main character faces. Find details in the poem that tell how the main character deals with the challenge. Consider the lesson that can be learned. Lessons that can be learned often are connected to how the characters act.

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day:
The score stood four to two, with but one inning more to play,
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,
A pall-like silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The rest⁵
Clung to the hope which springs eternal in the human breast;
They thought, “If only Casey could but get a whack at that—
We'd put up even money now, with Casey at the bat.”

But Flynn preceded Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake,
And the former was a hoodoo, while the latter was a cake;¹⁰
So upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,
For there seemed but little chance of Casey getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,
And Blake, the much despised, tore the cover off the ball;
And when the dust had lifted, and men saw what had occurred,¹⁵
There was Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third.

Then from five thousand throats and more there rose a lusty yell;
It rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell;
It pounded on the mountain and recoiled upon the flat,
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.²⁰

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place;
There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile lit Casey's face.
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.

Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt;²⁵
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt;
Then while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
Defiance flashed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.³⁰
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped—
“That ain't my style,” said Casey. “Strike one!” the umpire said.



Teacher Notes: Determine How the Speaker in a Poem Reflects Upon a Topic

The goal of RL.5.2 is for students to understand and determine the theme of a fictional text using details, including how the characters respond to challenges in a story, or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic. Many students are leery of understanding poetry. With all of the figurative language, imagery, and symbolism, some students find it challenging to understand the meaning of a poem. Try to make studying poetry fun and interesting for students! The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Assign students a grade-appropriate poem. As a class, discuss who the speaker is and how he or she reflects upon the topic.
2. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Provide each group with a poem and direct the groups to discuss how the speaker reflects upon the poem, using the elements covered in the playlist, such as theme and tone. Each group will present the poem and their thoughts.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RL.5.2:

“Reading Poetry in the Middle Grades”: This resource provides 20 poems and activities that meet the Common Core standards, including RL.5.2

- <http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/e02710/introduction.pdf>

“Lesson 3: A Poem’s Theme”: These two resources provide a lesson plan, texts and materials, and standard alignment related to determining the theme of a poem.

- <http://www.readworks.org/lessons/grade5/words-wings-treasury-african-american-poetry-and-art/lesson-3>
- <http://www.readworks.org/lessons/grade5/leaf-leaf-autumn-poems/lesson-3>

