

Grade 6 Playlist: Determine a Theme and How It Is Conveyed Through Details

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2*:

- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details.

Welcome

Most stories have a theme and some stories even have multiple themes. The theme of a story is its message. To understand the theme of a story, a reader will pay close attention to the details of the story. Learning to identify and understand these details helps readers better understand narratives.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- determine the theme of a text.
- think critically about how that theme is conveyed through the details of the text.

Key Terms

- The **theme** of a text is its message or lesson.
- The theme of a story is communicated through **plot, characters, setting, style, dialogue, and narration.**

Exploring the Standard

The theme of a story is often universal. This means that the theme applies to more than just one particular story. It is a message or lesson that is being told through a particular story, but many different stories may share the same theme. An example of a theme is *if people want to be able to trust others, they should first be trustworthy themselves*. Notice that the theme is a complete thought, an idea—a theme is the idea surrounding a subject or topic.

Authors have many different ways of developing the theme of a story. They can use all or particular elements of a story, such as setting and characters, for examples, to develop the theme. A reader then will pay attention to the details of a story to understand its theme.

Watch

Watch this video to understand theme:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/how-to-identify-theme/53395>



A Closer Look: Identifying the Theme

Read the selection from XII of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.

¹"I am miserable," he said. "Miserable!"

²He looked as if he was. Even his pride could not keep his voice steady or his hands from shaking. For a moment it almost seemed as if his deep, fierce eyes had tears in them. "Perhaps it is because I am miserable that I have come to you," he said, quite glaring down at her. "I used to hate you; I have been jealous of you. This wretched, disgraceful business has changed that. After seeing that repulsive woman who calls herself the wife of my son Bevis, I actually felt it would be a relief to look at you. I have been an obstinate old fool, and I suppose I have treated you badly. You are like the boy, and the boy is the first object in my life. I am miserable, and I came to you merely because you are like the boy, and he cares for you, and I care for him. Treat me as well as you can, for the boy's sake."

While reading, think about the overall meaning of the selection. Burnett is telling a story, but he is also trying to communicate a message about life to his reader. What is that message?

When identifying the theme of a text, it is important to first understand what is happening in the text. In the selection above, a man confesses to a woman that he is miserable. He tells her that his feelings toward her have changed; although once he hated her, he now seeks out her company. He admits that he has treated her badly and reflects that they have someone in common that they both care about. He then asks the woman to be kind to him for the sake of the boy who is important to both of them. After figuring out what is happening in a passage, the reader is now able to pay attention to the details of the selection to identify the theme.

Discussion Starter

Reread the above selection and pay attention to the main character in the passage. What is the man like? What information does the reader have about his personality? What about his motives? What changes does this character undergo?

Hint!

When a main character undergoes a change, it is often connected to a theme in the story. Paying attention to these changes can help a reader identify the theme of a story. Think about why and how the character changes. Does it seem to be a good change?

Use the information gathered from the Discussion Starter to think about a lesson Burnett may want the reader to learn from this story. It seems that the man has been an unpleasant character until this point. Also, people can generally agree that no one wants to be known as unpleasant or mean. Considering this information, the theme of this passage likely has something to do with **why** the man changes his attitude toward the lady. It seems that his affection for the boy has allowed him to also care for someone the boy loves. However, this cannot be the theme because it is too specific to the story. A theme needs to be more general. It should be something that can be applied to life outside the world of the story. An example of a theme of this story could be that *caring for one person can make it easier to care for other people as well*. Another theme could be that *admitting to personal faults can lead to people being more compassionate*. While these are lessons that Burnett could be trying to illustrate, these ideas can also be found in other stories also.

