

Grade 8 Playlist: Determine the Relationship Between Themes or Central Ideas and Other Elements

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2:

- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

Welcome

What makes a story a story? Nearly all short stories, books, poems, plays, and movies have several things in common. They typically have a cast of characters, a plot, and a specific setting. Stories also have central ideas and themes, which are developed throughout the course of the stories. A story's central idea or theme is dependent on the other elements of the story—characters, plot, and setting.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text.
- provide an objective summary of the text.

Review

Key Terms

- An author usually tries to send a message in a work of literature, whether it be very clear and obvious or more difficult to determine. This message is called the work's **theme**.
- A story's **central idea** is very similar to a theme. However, a central idea does not always send a message. The central idea is the subject of the story. All of the details in a story support and are related to the story's central idea.
- Three important elements influence the theme and central idea of a story:
 - The **characters** are the people in a book, play, or movie. Their interactions and dialogue affect what will happen in the story and how the story's theme or central idea develops. Often it is the story's main character, or **protagonist**, who gives the theme its shape.
 - A story's **setting** is where it takes place. This includes the physical place (such as a rural area, a city, inside a house, or on an airplane) and the time period (the current day, in the future, or long ago).
 - The term **plot** refers to everything that happens in a story. Usually, a plot will include a conflict that begins the story, rising action as it escalates, a climax in which the story has its turning point, and the falling action afterward. Of course, not every story's plot follows this format.



Watch!

To learn more about the elements of a story and how they relate to theme and central idea, watch this video:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/the-elements-of-a-short-story/1030375>

Exploring the Standard

The theme and central idea of a story are sometimes clearly stated. But more often, they must be determined by examining the actions of the characters, the events in the plot, and how the setting shapes those actions and events. By determining a theme or central idea and identifying those actions and events most important to determining them, a reader can objectively summarize the text.

Fables usually have very strong themes, or **morals**, that teach the reader lessons. The fabulist Aesop stated the morals of his own fables very clearly at the end of each tale. Below are a few that are familiar to most readers and their morals.

"The Crow and the Pitcher"	Little by little does the trick.
"The Lion and the Mouse"	Little friends may prove great friends.
"The Fox and the Grapes"	It is easy to despise what you cannot get.

A Closer Look: Key Details

The key details in a story can be a major help in determining theme and central idea. What is the conflict in the story, and how does it lead to the climax? How do the characters respond to the conflict? What impact do the time and place of the story have on the plot and characters? All of these details put together are pivotal in building the author's message to the reader.

Read!

Read about steps in finding the theme of a poem. Consider answering the practice questions that follow.

- http://msscasselmansclass.weebly.com/uploads/1/7/6/2/17620823/copy_of_finding-the-theme-of-a-poem.pdf

Example

In this famous poem by Edgar Allan Poe, the narrator talks about things that happened in his past. When he was only a boy, he was madly in love with a girl his age. Unfortunately, their time together ended abruptly when Annabel Lee died a horrible and untimely death. From this description, think about what the theme and central idea might be, then read or listen to the poem.

Listen!

Listen to an audio recording of "Annabel Lee" by Edgar Allan Poe:

- <https://librivox.org/short-poetry-collection-002/>



Teaching Notes: Determine the Relationship Between Themes or Central Ideas and Other Elements

The goal of RL.8.2 is for students to be able to determine a literary work's **central idea** and **theme** and their relationships with the work's **characters**, **plot**, and **setting**. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Have the students locate other poems by Edgar Allan Poe. Then, have them determine the central ideas and themes of these poems. As a class, discuss the variety of themes used by Poe in his poetic works. Are there any that are more common than others? Did Poe use the same themes found in "Annabel Lee" very often in his other works?

Writing Prompts

1. Assign students a fable written by Aesop. Then have them write a complete short story set in modern times with human characters that shares the same theme as their assigned fable. Challenge the students to closely align with the fable's theme while making their story's characters, plot, and setting as different as possible.
2. Ask students to think about the relationship between setting and theme. How important is a story's setting to its theme? Is it possible for a setting to have no influence on theme? Have students write a short essay explaining their thoughts. Instruct students to use at least two different short stories, novels, or poems in their explanation.
3. Everlasting love is the most prominent theme in "Annabel Lee." What other themes are evident in this poem? Have students identify three minor themes in "Annabel Lee" and write an analysis of these themes and how they relate to the characters, plot, and setting of the poem.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RL.8.2:

"Reading Poetry in the Middle Grades": This resource gives activities for teaching poetry to the Common Core standards:

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

"Teaching Theme Analysis in Layers": This resource gives strategies for teaching theme in literature on the eighth-grade level:

- <https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-themes>

