

Grades 9–10 Playlist: Theme, Central Ideas, and Summaries

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2*:

- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Welcome

When an author writes a book, poem, or play, he or she tries to make a point to the reader. This point might concern the story's plot, its characters, or its setting. A story's theme or central idea is like its skeleton; once it is expressed by the author, it must be fleshed out with details that shape, refine, and support this message. While a strong, well-constructed frame is essential for any building, it is the details that make it a comfortable, beautifully finished home.

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, or **theme**. A story's **central idea** is very similar, but does not always send a message. The central idea is what the story is mostly about. All of the details in a story support and are related to the story's central idea.
- **Details** are the small, individual pieces of information of a story. They help support the main idea by giving evidence for ideas the author develops and providing information about the characters, plot, and setting of the story. Effective details should be:
 - **Descriptive**—Details should give the reader a clear picture of what a setting looks like, what kind of person a character is, or how the events in the story are affecting the message.
 - **Specific**—Details should clearly define what they describe, and it should not take too much work to understand why the author included the in a story.
- A **summary** is a short retelling of a story. Sometimes stories can be thousands of words long. A summary should be about four to five sentences long.
 - It is very important that a summary be **objective**. This means that it should be unbiased, with no opinions about the text itself.



Watch!

To refresh on how to identify a theme, watch this video:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/identifying-the-theme-in-literature-youtube/106824>

Exploring the Standard

The theme and central idea of a story are either stated clearly or implied through the story's setting, the actions of its characters, and the events in the story's plot. Usually, the theme and central idea can be determined early in the story. However, the theme and central idea continues to develop throughout the narrative, growing and changing in the process.

A Closer Look: Key Details

What helps the story develop? Details! The key details in a story give the information that show the reader how the theme and central idea change and grow. If a theme is particularly complex, it may develop into more themes. For example, a story with the theme that family is important might take a different turn when a brother or sister is horribly spurned by someone trusted, and the rest of the family decides that the person must pay for what he or she did, but then everyone ends up hurt. Those details help develop another theme in the story, such as the consequences of revenge.

Watch!

To learn more about main ideas and supporting details, watch this video:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=50&v=j104XC8JF4s>

Example

The novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley is one of the most popular horror stories. Its central idea, which involves a curious doctor creating a monster and bringing it to life, is well known. *Frankenstein* is a story that contains many themes, such as exploring the limits of science, the nature of life and of existence, and the boundaries of moral obligation. Read this excerpt from Chapter 5 of *Frankenstein*, in which Dr. Frankenstein sees his creation come to life, and determine the theme(s) present in this selection.

Listen!

Listen to an audio recording of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley:

- <https://librivox.org/frankenstein-or-modern-prometheus-by-mary-w-shelley/>



Teaching Notes: Theme, Central Ideas, and Summaries

The goal of RL.9-10.2 is for students to be able to determine how a literary work's **central idea** and **theme** are developed within a story through **key details** and how to write an **objective** summary. 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. Locate other excerpts from *Frankenstein* that address other themes in the story, such as the pain of abandonment and the price of forbidden knowledge. Have a class discussion on these themes, encouraging the students to locate details that support the themes and explain why they are important to theme development.
2. Have the students form small groups. Assign each group a short story of about 2–3 pages. Then, have the groups read and discuss the stories and determine the theme(s), indicating the details that support these theme(s), using an outline or graphic organizer.

Writing Prompts

1. Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* employs many themes. Have the students find a short story that includes a similar theme and write an objective summary of the story that explores and develops that theme in a different fashion than Shelley does.
2. Direct students to write their own short story, using the same theme. Remind them to include details that are both descriptive and specific.

Practice! Answer

In this excerpt, Dr. Frankenstein describes the results of his creation on a night in November. He describes the pain he feels when he sees that he created a hideous monster. He also describes how much he wanted to create it and the regret that came with the realization of what he truly made.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RL.9-10.2:

“Strategies for Teaching Theme”: This resource discusses strategies for teaching theme to high school students using short stories by the author Saki.

- <http://www.brighthubeducation.com/high-school-english-lessons/24132-teaching-theme-using-the-interlopers/>

“Themes, Symbols, and Motifs: Reading Between the Lines”: This resource explores how symbols and motifs help build themes in stories.

- <http://www.storyboardthat.com/articles/education/english/themes-symbols-and-motifs>

