

Teaching Notes

The goal of RL.11–12.2 is for students to understand and be able to explain how two or more themes are developed and how they interact and build on one another. 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.

Exploring the Standard

Practice: Discussion Starter

In this playlist, students are asked to identify two interrelated themes in a passage and analyze how those themes build on one another to give the reader a more complex understanding of each theme. At this point in the playlist, students are invited to think about one topic in the passage: the relationship between society and the individual. After being given one instance of the topic in the text, they are asked to identify other instances of the topic. It may be helpful to encourage students to create a concept map with the topic in the middle and ideas related to the topic listed around the edges of this main idea. This will give students a visual representation of the ways in which this topic works in the passage, and it will help them visualize how a topic becomes a theme.

Writing Prompt

1. Direct students to analyze the theme of the city as a place of beauty by answering the following question in an essay: How do the details develop this theme? Students should focus on the imagery surrounding the depiction of the city, such as describing the skyscrapers as beautiful towers that rise above the mist: “sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods.”
2. Assign students a grade-appropriate excerpt from a fictional text with two themes and direct students to answer the following question in an essay: What themes are developed in this passage, and how do the themes intersect throughout?

Applying the Standard

This section of the playlist is meant to give students the opportunity to practice identifying topics and themes. They are also asked to practice analyzing how two different themes build on one another in ways that add to an understanding of how each theme works in the text. For this purpose, a passage from Anzia Yezierska’s *Hungry Hearts* is included in this section. Encourage students to first make a list of topics and then choose one to develop into a theme. They may find it helpful to use the discussion starter prompts and concept maps to do this.

Because this exercise is meant to allow students the chance to practice newly acquired skills, it is best if students have the opportunity to complete this activity with as little guidance as possible. If students have trouble identifying topics, suggest looking at the relationships between the characters in the story. What does the reader know about each character? What can a reader glean from the relationships between these characters? Ask questions to help students further explore topics like economic classes, the importance of money, the importance of community, and self-preservation.



Additional Resources

Consider this additional resource when teaching RL.11–12.2:

“Discerning Themes in Literature”: This resource is a video of a teacher discussing how to find the theme of a book with his class.

- <http://www.watchknowlearn.org/Video.aspx?VideoID=54680&CategoryID=1445>



Self-Check: RL.11–12.2

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Stimuli ID and/or Title	ELA_G11_STIM00012
Passage Title	Excerpt from <i>Chapter 7 of “The Awakening”</i>
Author	Kate Chopin
Word Count	672
Lexile	970L

Excerpt from Chapter 7 of “The Awakening”

Kate Chopin

- 1 The two women went away one morning to the beach together, arm in arm, under the huge white sunshade. Edna had prevailed upon Madame Ratignolle to leave the children behind, though she could not induce her to relinquish a diminutive roll of needlework, which Adele begged to be allowed to slip into the depths of her pocket. In some unaccountable way they had escaped from Robert.

...
- 2 Edna Pontellier, casting her eyes about, had finally kept them at rest upon the sea. The day was clear and carried the gaze out as far as the blue sky went; there were a few white clouds suspended idly over the horizon. A lateen sail was visible in the direction of Cat Island, and others to the south seemed almost motionless in the far distance.
- 3 “Of whom—of what are you thinking?” asked Adele of her companion, whose countenance she had been watching with a little amused attention, arrested by the absorbed expression which seemed to have seized and fixed every feature into a statuesque repose.
- 4 “Nothing,” returned Mrs. Pontellier, with a start, adding at once: “How stupid! But it seems to me it is the reply we make instinctively to such a question. Let me see,” she went on, throwing back her head and narrowing her fine eyes till they shone like two vivid points of light. “Let me see. I was really not conscious of thinking of anything; but perhaps I can retrace my thoughts.”
- 5 “Oh! never mind!” laughed Madame Ratignolle. “I am not quite so exacting. I will let you off this time. It is really too hot to think, especially to think about thinking.”



- 6 “But for the fun of it,” persisted Edna. “First of all, the sight of the water stretching so far away, those motionless sails against the blue sky, made a delicious picture that I just wanted to sit and look at. The hot wind beating in my face made me think—without any connection that I can trace of a summer day in Kentucky, of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, which was higher than her waist. She threw out her arms as if swimming when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water. Oh, I see the connection now!”
- 7 “Where were you going that day in Kentucky, walking through the grass?”
- 8 “I don’t remember now. I was just walking diagonally across a big field. My sun-bonnet obstructed the view. I could see only the stretch of green before me, and I felt as if I must walk on forever, without coming to the end of it. I don’t remember whether I was frightened or pleased. I must have been entertained.
- 9 “Likely as not it was Sunday,” she laughed; “and I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of.”
- 10 “And have you been running away from prayers ever since, ma chere?” asked Madame Ratignolle, amused.
- 11 “No! oh, no!” Edna hastened to say. “I was a little unthinking child in those days, just following a misleading impulse without question. On the contrary, during one period of my life religion took a firm hold upon me; after I was twelve and until—until—why, I suppose until now, though I never thought much about it—just driven along by habit. But do you know,” she broke off, turning her quick eyes upon Madame Ratignolle and leaning forward a little so as to bring her face quite close to that of her companion, “sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided.”
- 12 Madame Ratignolle laid her hand over that of Mrs. Pontellier, which was near her. Seeing that the hand was not withdrawn, she clasped it firmly and warmly. She even stroked it a little, fondly, with the other hand, murmuring in an undertone, “Pauvre chérie.”



1. Which of the following themes is suggested in paragraph 6?

- A. beauty
- B. regret
- C. isolation
- D. silence

Item ID	ELA_G11_MCQ_WN02241
DOK level	2
Answer Choice Rationale 1	Key. In this paragraph, Edna describes the “delicious picture” of the sky and the water. This hints at the theme of beauty in the passage.
Answer Choice Rationale 2	Edna is commenting on the beauty of her surroundings, not on any regret.
Answer Choice Rationale 3	Edna does not mention that she feels isolated in this paragraph.
Answer Choice Rationale 4	The entire paragraph mainly focuses on visuals. It does not make any comments on sound or lack thereof.

2. Which of the following details would be most important to include in a summary of the passage?

- A. Madame Ratignolle and Mrs. Pontellier stroll on the beach together.
- B. Madame Ratignolle notices that Mrs. Pontellier seems distracted by distant thoughts.
- C. Mrs. Pontellier remembers the sermons that her father used to give at church services.
- D. Mrs. Pontellier remembers the meadows of Kentucky when she looks across the water.

Item ID	ELA_G11_MCQ_WN02240
DOK level	2
Answer Choice Rationale 1	The two women walking on the beach is a detail more about the setting than the plot.
Answer Choice Rationale 2	Key. In paragraph 3, Madame Ratignolle notices that Mrs. Pontellier seems distracted. This is important to the passage because this observation leads to the conversation in the rest of the story.
Answer Choice Rationale 3	Mrs. Pontellier’s memories of church are a less important detail than her distraction.
Answer Choice Rationale 4	Mrs. Pontellier’s memories of Kentucky are a less important detail than her distraction.



Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Stimuli ID and/or Title	ELA_G11_STIM00019
Passage Title	The Raven
Author	Edgar Allan Poe
Word Count	602
Lexile	NA

“The Raven”

Edgar Allan Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,--
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
5 “’Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door:
Only this and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow;--vainly I had sought to borrow
10 From my books surcease of sorrow--sorrow for the lost Lenore,
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore:
Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me--filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
15 So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
“’Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door,
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door:
This it is and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
20 “Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you”--here I opened wide the door:--
Darkness there and nothing more.



25 Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore?"
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "Lenore":
30 Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore;
35 Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore:
'Tis the wind and nothing more."

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
40 But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door,
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door:
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,--
45 "Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore:
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

Much I marveled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
50 Though its answer little meaning--little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door,
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as "Nevermore."

55 But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour,
Nothing further then he uttered, not a feather then he fluttered,
Till I scarcely more than muttered,--"Other friends have flown before;
On the morrow he will leave me, as my Hopes have flown before."
60 Then the bird said, "Nevermore."



3. Which of the following statements would be the most important to include in a summary of the poem?
- A. The speaker is reading and falls asleep.
 - B. The speaker thinks the raven looks dignified.
 - C. The speaker is trying to get over his lost love.
 - D. The speaker asks the raven what its name is.

Item ID	ELA_G11_MCQ_WN02254
DOK level	1
Answer Choice Rationale 1	This statement is not crucial to the plot.
Answer Choice Rationale 2	The speaker's thoughts about the raven's appearance are not crucial to the plot.
Answer Choice Rationale 3	Key. One of the main ideas in the passage is the speaker getting over his lost love. That detail is more important to include in a summary than any of the other choices.
Answer Choice Rationale 4	The speaker asking the raven its name is not crucial to the plot.

4. Which line from "The Raven" **best** shows how the themes of darkness and sadness are intertwined in the poem?
- A. "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,"
 - B. "Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,--"
 - C. "While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,"
 - D. "As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door."

Item ID	ELA_RL.11-12.2_CLO_Q513
DOK level	2
Key/correct answer	The line, "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary" shows how the themes of darkness and sadness are intertwined because the night is referred to as "dreary," and the author seems to be pondering sadly (weak and weary).

Read the passage. Then answer the question.

Stimuli ID and/or Title	ELA_STIM00383_a
Passage Title	Excerpt from <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>
Author	Nathaniel Hawthorne
Word Count	798
Lexile	1310L



Excerpt from *The Scarlet Letter*

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Hester Prynne, a woman living in a small town, is forced to live shame for adultery. Despite this, Hester remains dignified and refuses to name the man she had an affair with. In the following excerpt, she is speaking with the minister of the town's church, Arthur Dimmesdale. Their thoughts and feelings are expressed.

- 1 Arthur Dimmesdale gazed into Hester's face with a look in which hope and joy shone out, indeed, but with fear betwixt them, and a kind of horror at her boldness, who had spoken what he vaguely hinted at, but dared not speak.
- 2 But Hester Prynne, with a mind of native courage and activity, and for so long a period not merely estranged, but outlawed from society, had habituated herself to such latitude of speculation as was altogether foreign to the clergyman. She had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness, as vast, as intricate, and shadowy as the untamed forest, amid the gloom of which they were now holding a colloquy that was to decide their fate. Her intellect and heart had their home, as it were, in desert places, where she roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods. For years past she had looked from this estranged point of view at human institutions, and whatever priests or legislators had established; criticising all with hardly more reverence than the Indian would feel for the clerical band, the judicial robe, the pillory, the gallows, the fireside, or the church. The tendency of her fate and fortunes had been to set her free. The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers—stern and wild ones—and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss.
- 3 The minister, on the other hand, had never gone through an experience calculated to lead him beyond the scope of generally received laws; although, in a single instance, he had so fearfully transgressed one of the most sacred of them. But this had been a sin of passion, not of principle, nor even purpose. Since that wretched epoch, he had watched with morbid zeal and minuteness, not his acts—for those it was easy to arrange—but each breath of emotion, and his every thought. At the head of the social system, as the clergymen of that day stood, he was only the more trammelled by its regulations, its principles, and even its prejudices. As a priest, the framework of his order inevitably hemmed him in. As a man who had once sinned, but who kept his conscience all alive and painfully sensitive by the fretting of an unhealed wound, he might have been supposed safer within the line of virtue than if he had never sinned at all.
- 4 Thus we seem to see that, as regarded Hester Prynne, the whole seven years of outlaw and ignominy had been little other than a preparation for this very hour. But Arthur Dimmesdale! Were such a man once more to fall, what plea could be urged in extenuation of his crime? None; unless it avail him somewhat that he was broken down by long and exquisite suffering; that his mind was darkened and confused by the very remorse which harrowed it; that, between fleeing as an avowed criminal, and remaining as a hypocrite, conscience might find it hard to strike the balance; that it was human to avoid the peril of death and infamy, and the inscrutable machinations of an enemy; that, finally, to this poor pilgrim, on his dreary and desert path, faint,



sick, miserable, there appeared a glimpse of human affection and sympathy, a new life, and a true one, in exchange for the heavy doom which he was now expiating. And be the stern and sad truth spoken, that the breach which guilt has once made into the human soul is never, in this mortal state, repaired. It may be watched and guarded, so that the enemy shall not force his way again into the citadel, and might even in his subsequent assaults, select some other avenue, in preference to that where he had formerly succeeded. But there is still the ruined wall, and near it the stealthy tread of the foe that would win over again his unforgotten triumph.

- 5 The struggle, if there were one, need not be described. Let it suffice that the clergyman resolved to flee, and not alone.
- 6 “If in all these past seven years,” thought he, “I could recall one instant of peace or hope, I would yet endure, for the sake of that earnest of Heaven’s mercy. But now—since I am irrevocably doomed—wherefore should I not snatch the solace allowed to the condemned culprit before his execution? Or, if this be the path to a better life, as Hester would persuade me, I surely give up no fairer prospect by pursuing it! Neither can I any longer live without her companionship; so powerful is she to sustain—so tender to soothe! O Thou to whom I dare not lift mine eyes, wilt Thou yet pardon me?”

5. Which of the following are themes of the story? Select the **two** correct answers.

- A. music
- B. guilt
- C. love
- D. war
- E. heat

Item ID	ELA_RL.11-12.2_MCQ_Q505
DOK level	2
Key/correct answer	<p>Guilt is a theme of <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> because Arthur feels guilt for his sins.</p> <p>Love is a theme of <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> because Arthur and Hester love each other.</p>

