

**Theme** refers to a message about **life** or **human nature** expressed in literature.

- ▶ Theme is generally not directly written. Readers must use details from the text to infer the theme.
- ▶ How characters respond to challenges in a story often reveals the theme.

**Theme:** "If at first you don't succeed, try and try again."



adapted from **The Crow and the Pitcher** by Aesop

challenge

1. A Crow, half-dead with thirst, came upon a water pitcher. 2. But when the Crow put its beak into the opening of the pitcher, very little water was left in it, and he could not reach far enough down to drink. 3. After making many

attempts to reach the water, an idea came to him. 4. He took a small rock and dropped it into the pitcher. 5. Then he took another rock and dropped it into the pitcher. 6. After some time, he saw the water rise, and was able to quench his thirst and save his life.

94 words

**Not an example of theme:**

Crow learned how to get water out of a pitcher.

response

CFU

Which of the following sentences could be a theme in a text? How do you know?

- A **It is polite to say please and thank you.**
- B **Be thankful for what you have.**

In your own words, what is a theme?

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Examples of Themes:	Not examples of Theme:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Never give up.</li><li>2. Love conquers<sub>5</sub> all.</li><li>3. Looks can be deceiving<sub>6</sub>.</li><li>4. Crime does not pay.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Please use your manners.</li><li>2. Fractions are important to learn.</li><li>3. Roberto is my friend.</li><li>4. The criminal was caught near the bank.</li></ol>



Which statement(s) below might be a theme? Why?

- A. Good will always win.**
- B. My friend Carlos is nice to me.**
- C. In science class, I learn about insects.**

1. Read the text.
  - a. Identify the challenge. (underline)
  - b. Identify the character's response to the challenge. (double underline)
2. Determine the theme. (answer)

excerpt from The Wizard Of Oz  
by L. Frank Baum

"If the elephants and the tigers and the bears had ever tried to fight me, I should have run myself – I'm such a coward," said the Lion, wiping a tear from his eye with the tip of his tail. "It is my great sorrow, and makes my life very unhappy. But whenever there is danger, my heart begins to beat fast."

*several hours later...*

"Welcome, O King of Beasts! You have come in good time to fight our enemy and bring peace to all the animals of the forest once more."

"What is your trouble?" asked the Lion quietly.

"We are all threatened," answered the tiger. "Are there any other lions in this forest?" he asked. "No, there were some, but the monster has eaten them all. And, besides, they were none of them nearly so large and brave as you."

The great spider was lying asleep when the Lion found him. The Lion knew it was easier to fight it asleep than awake; he gave a great spring and landed directly upon the monster's back. Then, with one blow of his heavy paw, he knocked the spider's head from its body. The Lion went back to the opening where the beasts of the forest were waiting for him and said proudly: "You need fear your enemy no longer."  
242 words

**Which sentence would best be the theme of the passage?**

- A The Lion believes that you should enjoy life whenever possible.
- B The animals in the forest beg the Lion to kill the monster.
- C The Lion learned if you try hard you can achieve more than you believe.
- D The Lion learned that the animals of the forest needed his help.

**Theme:**

***If you try hard, you can achieve more than you believe.***

Using details from the text, summarize how the character's actions reveal the theme in the passage.

1. Read the text.
  - a. Identify the challenge. (underline)
  - b. Identify the character's response to the challenge. (double underline)
2. Determine the theme. (answer)

adapted from **The Bundle of Sticks** by Aesop

Once, an old man was very ill and lay dying in his bed. He had three sons who were always fighting with each other. He worried about them and finally asked his sons to come to him. When they arrived, the old man gave them a bundle of sticks and said, "Can you break these sticks?" The first son tried to break the bundle. He tried until he was red in the face, but nothing happened. Next, the second son tried his luck. He thought it would be an easy task and quickly picked up the sticks. He tried his best to break the sticks but after many attempts he finally gave up. Meanwhile, the youngest son laughed at his brothers and thought of a different plan.

He cleverly took one stick at a time from the bundle and easily broke all of them. The old father then smiled at all of his sons and said, "Children, do you understand what happened? It is always easy to break the sticks one by one. But when they are bundled together, none of you could break them. In the same way, you three brothers should always work together. No one will be able to hurt you then." The three brothers realized what their father was trying to teach them and forgot all their hatred toward one another. From that day forward they lived in peace and harmony.



235 words

**Which sentence would best be the theme of the passage?**

- A Sometimes family members disagree with each other.
- B The three sons learn that wooden sticks are difficult to break.
- C The sons realize that there is strength in unity.
- D The sons realize that their father has become weak in his old age.

**Using details from the text, summarize how the character's actions reveal the theme in the passage.**

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The theme of this passage is "**Sometimes we must sacrifice to help others.**" Identify which sentences are useful in helping determine the theme of the passage. Underline.

adapted from **Little Women** by Louisa May Alcott

1. "Not far away from here lies a poor woman with a newborn baby and six children huddled into one bed to keep from freezing, for they have no fire. 2. There is nothing to eat over there, and the oldest boy came to tell me they were suffering hunger and cold. 3. My girls, will you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?"

4. They were all unusually hungry, having waited nearly an hour, and for a minute no one spoke, only a minute, for Jo exclaimed impetuously, "I'm so glad you came before we began!"

5. "May I go and help carry the things to the poor little children?" asked Beth eagerly.

6. "I shall take the cream and the muffins," added Amy, heroically giving up the items she most liked. 7. "I thought you'd do it," said Mrs. March, smiling as if satisfied.

8. "You shall all go and help me, and when we come back we will have bread and milk for breakfast, and make it up at dinnertime."

9. The March Family arrived at a poor, miserable room, with broken windows, no fire, ragged bedclothes, a sick mother, wailing baby, and a group of pale, hungry children cuddled under one old quilt, trying to keep warm. 10. In a few minutes it really did seem as if kind spirits had been at work there. 11. A fire was built and the broken windows had been stopped up with old hats and a cloak. 12. Mrs. March gave the mother tea and oatmeal, and comforted her with promises of help, while she dressed the little baby. 13. The girls meantime spread the table, set the children round the fire, and fed them like so many hungry birds, laughing and talking.

281 words

### Skill Closure

1. Read the text.
  - a. Identify the challenge. (underline)
  - b. Identify the character's response to the challenge. (double underline)

#### The Lion and the Mouse by Aesop

1. A Lion lay asleep in the forest, his head resting on his paws. 2. A shy little Mouse came upon him suddenly, and in her rush to get away, ran across the Lion's nose. 3. Woken from his nap, the Lion laid his huge paw angrily on the tiny creature, trapping her. 4. "Spare me!" begged the Mouse. 5. "Please let me go and some day I will repay you." 6. The Lion laughed to think that a Mouse could ever help him. 7. But he let the Mouse go. 8. Some days later, the Lion was caught in a hunter's net. 9. Unable to free himself, he filled the forest with his angry roar. 10. The Mouse knew the voice and quickly found the Lion struggling in the net. 11. Running to one of the great ropes that bound him, she chewed it until it broke, and soon the Lion was free. 12. "You laughed when I said I would repay you," said the Mouse. 13. "Now you see that even a small Mouse can help a Lion."

166 words

### Concept Closure

Write three sentences using the past, present, and future verb tenses.

#### Past

#### Present

#### Future

Write a sentence for each picture. Use context clues that provide information about the word. Read the sentence.




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chipmunk



cattails

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### Summary Closure

What did you learn today about determining a theme by how the characters respond to challenges? (Pair-Share) Use words in the word bank.

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#### Word Bank

- determine
- context clues
- unknown words
- identify

1. Read the text.
  - a. Identify the challenge. (underline)
  - b. Identify the character's response to the challenge. (double underline)
2. Determine the theme. (answer)

adapted from The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf

1. On a countryside in Spain, a number of young bulls liked to romp and play, butting their heads with each other. 2. All except Ferdinand, who found more delight sitting under a tree and smelling the flowers. 3. His mother would try to get him to play along, but Ferdinand would just shake his head and say, "I like it better here where I can sit quietly and smell the flowers."

5. As the years went by Ferdinand grew very big and strong. 6. All the other bulls, which were also grown up, would fight each other every day. 7. They would butt each other and stick each other with their horns. 8. Each of them desperately wanted to be picked to fight at the bullfights in Madrid. But not Ferdinand-- he still just liked to sit quietly under his tree and smell the flowers.

9. One day, some men from town came to choose a bull for the bullfight. 10. The other bulls eagerly paraded their skills before the men. 11. But Ferdinand just quietly watched. 12. Tired of the fighting, he went to go sit down in the shade, and accidentally sat on a bee! 13. The sting of the bee spooked Ferdinand, and in his pain, he jumped up with a wild snort. 14. He ran around puffing and butting and pawing the ground as if he were crazy. 15. The men saw him and they all shouted with joy. 16. They had found the largest and fiercest bull of all. 17. Just the one for the bullfights in Madrid! 18. So they took him to town to prepare for the event.

19. They called him 'Ferdinand the Fierce' and everyone was afraid of him. 20. Ferdinand ran to the middle of the ring and the people shouted and clapped. 21. They thought he was going to fight fiercely and butt and snort and stick his horns. 22. But not Ferdinand. 23. When he got into the ring he saw the flowers in all the lovely señoritas' hair and he just sat down quietly and smelled.

24. Ferdinand wouldn't fight no matter what anyone did. 25. He just sat and smelled the flowers. 26. The matador<sub>2</sub> was so mad he cried in defeat because he couldn't show off his bullfighting skills, or his fancy cape and sword! 27. So they had to take Ferdinand home.

28. And for all anyone knows he is sitting there still, under his favorite tree, quietly smelling the flowers. 29. Happy as can be.

394 words

**Which sentence would best be the theme of the passage?**

- A Ferdinand believes that you have to fight for what you want in life.
- B Ferdinand realized that a bee sting can be very painful.
- C Ferdinand learned that you have to stay true to yourself and what you believe in.
- D Ferdinand learned how important bullfighting is to the people of Madrid.

**Theme:**

**Stay true to yourself and what you believe in.**

Using details from the text, summarize how the character's actions reveal the theme in the passage.



## Listening

adapted from **Beauty and the Beast** by G.S. Barbot de Villeneuve

1. Once upon a time, a merchant had finished his business and he set off for home. 2. Remembering his promise to his daughter Beauty, he picked a rose. 3. Instantly, out of the rose garden, sprang a horrible beast. 4. "Theft of my favorite flowers! 5. I shall put you to death for this slight!" 6. Trembling with fear, the merchant fell on his knees.

7. "Forgive me! 8. I'll do anything you say! 10. The rose wasn't for me, it was for my daughter. 11. I promised to bring her back a rose from my journey!" 12. "I shall spare your life, but on one condition, that you bring me your daughter!" 13. The terror-stricken merchant, faced with certain death if he did not obey, promised that he would do so. 14. When he reached home in tears, Beauty put his mind at rest immediately. 15. "Dear father, I'd do anything for you! 16. Don't worry, you'll be able to keep your promise and save your life!" 17. So Beauty was led to the castle.

18. In the beginning, Beauty was frightened of the Beast, and shuddered at the sight of it. 19. Then she found that, in spite of the monster's awful head, her horror of it was gradually fading as time went

by. 20. She had one of the finest rooms in the Castle, and sat for hours, reading in front of the fire. 21. And the Beast would sit, for hours on end, only a short distance away, silently gazing at her. 22. Then it started to say a few kind words, fill in the end, Beauty was amazed to discover that she was actually enjoying its conversation. 23. The days passed, and Beauty and the Beast became good friends.

271 words

### Which sentence would best be the theme of the passage?

- A Beauty thinks that it is not good to steal from others.
- B Beauty learned that honesty is the best policy.
- C Beauty learned that good friends can be found where you least expect them.
- D Beauty realized that the Beast was capable of kind words and conversation.





## Reading

### A Legend of the Iroquois

1. Long ago, the Earth was covered in darkness. 2. None of the creatures knew what daylight looked like. 3. So all of the animals of the forest gathered together in a meadow. 4. They wondered if it would be better to remain in darkness, or if it would be better to also have light. 5. The most powerful animal in the forest was the bear; Bear argued for remaining in darkness. 6. He said that the creatures of the forest would be able to sleep better in darkness. 7. Most of the other animals were afraid, so they agreed with Bear. 8. Raccoon said that he did not mind the darkness because his great vision helped him find plenty of food in the dark. 9. Wolf was easy to please because she could be heard anywhere by howling in the darkness. 10. But one animal did stand up to Bear. 11. Chipmunk, the smallest of the animals, argued that it would be better to have both light and dark. 12. Chipmunk was very curious, and wanted to see what the earth looked like in the light. 13. As Bear continued to argue for darkness, Chipmunk made many good arguments for light. 14. Bear grew tired of talking, but Chipmunk chattered on and on, as if she had all of the energy in the world. 15. As the other animals dropped off to sleep, one by one, Chipmunk kept arguing. 16. Finally, the sun heard her words, and the first sunrise appeared. 17. Chipmunk began to dance from rock to rock. 18. Bear became angry because he didn't get his way. 19. He roared loudly and ran after Chipmunk. 20. He chased Chipmunk all the way down the mountain. 21. Bear was fast, and he reached out his giant paw to grab Chipmunk. 22. Chipmunk got away, but not before Bear managed to scratch her back with his long claws. 23. And that is why, to this day, you can see stripes on Chipmunk's back!

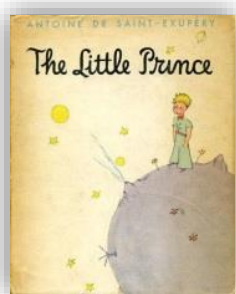
295 words

### Which sentence would best be the theme of the passage?

- A Chipmunk believes that you must fight for what you want.
- B Chipmunk learned that it is best to always follow the crowd.
- C Chipmunk learned that bears can be dangerous animals.
- D Chipmunk realizes that the other animals agreed with bear because they were afraid of him.



## Writing



Suggested Reading:  
The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Summarize: Write a brief overview, or summary, of the text.

Questions:

1. What is the story's theme?
2. How do the characters' actions help support the theme?
3. How do the main events (plot) help support the theme?
4. Did the story connect to your own life? Other stories you have read? Other characters? If yes, how?

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