

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

► **Theme** is **usually not written**; it is **inferred** from **details in the text**.

► Details in the text include **character actions**, **thoughts**, and **words**.

### Examples of Theme:

1. Never give up on your dreams.
2. Treat others the way you want to be treated.
3. Crime does not pay off in the end.

### Theme: "Leaving home for the first time is hard."

The adventure *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson is set in the days of sailing ships and pirates and tells the story of young Jim Hawkins who leaves home in search of the buried treasure of the evil pirate, Captain Flint.

<sup>1</sup>The landlord had found mother an apprentice so that she should not want help while I was gone. <sup>2</sup>**It was on seeing that boy I understood, for the first time, my situation.** <sup>3</sup>**I had thought up to that moment of the adventures before me, not at all of the home that I was leaving;** and now, **at sight of this clumsy stranger, who was to stay here in my place beside my mother, I had my first attack of tears. "I'll miss you, mother,"** I blurted out.

### NOT Examples of Theme:

**Subjects or topics** : "honesty," "loyalty," "jealousy," or "greed"

**Facts or directions**: Please use your manners. Fractions are important to learn. Friends like to laugh together. The criminal was caught near the bank.

### CFU

Why is **greed** not an example of theme?

Which statement below might be a theme? Why?

**A My friend Henry is wise.**

**B Money cannot buy you happiness.**

1. Read the text.
2. Identify details in the text that suggest the theme. (underline).
3. Determine the theme. (circle)

**Background:** *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott focuses on four young girls raised by their mother while their father is away during the American Civil War. Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy learn different lessons about life, love, and poverty.

### Little Women

<sup>1</sup>"It's so dreadful to be poor!" sighed Meg, looking at her old dress.

<sup>2</sup>"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy, with an injured sniff.

<sup>4</sup>Nobody spoke for a minute; then Meg said in an altered tone, "You know the reason Mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas was because it is going to be a hard winter for everyone; and she thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure, when our men are suffering so in the army. <sup>5</sup>We can't do much, but we can make our little sacrifices, and ought to do it gladly. <sup>6</sup>But I am afraid I don't." <sup>7</sup>And Meg shook her head, as she thought regretfully of all the pretty things she wanted.

#### 1. Which sentence would best be the theme of the text?

- A It's better to make yourself happy and not sacrifice.
- B Being poor leads to unhappiness.
- C It is important to sacrifice to help others.

#### 2. How was the theme developed using details in the text?

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1. Read the text.
2. Identify details in the text that suggest the theme. (underline).
3. Determine the theme. (circle)

**Background:** *Little Women* was written between 1868–1869. During this time, opportunities for women were limited. Women were expected to not have opinions and be obedient.

### **Little Women**

<sup>1</sup>Jo sat up, put her hands in her pockets, and began to whistle.

<sup>2</sup>“Don’t, Jo. <sup>3</sup>It’s so boyish!” said Amy.

<sup>4</sup>“That’s why I do it.”

<sup>5</sup>“You are old enough,” continued Amy, “to leave off boyish tricks and to behave better, Josephine. <sup>6</sup>It didn’t matter so much when you were a little girl, but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady.”

<sup>7</sup>“I’m not! <sup>8</sup>I hate to think I’ve got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns!” cried Jo. <sup>9</sup>“I’m dying to go and fight with Papa. <sup>10</sup>And I can only stay home and knit, like a boring, old woman!

### **3. Which sentence would best be the theme of the text?**

- A Being lady-like is the best way to be.
- B Live your life according to what is expected.
- C Don’t give into social expectations; be yourself.

### **4. How was the theme developed using details in the text?**

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## Skill Closure

1. Read the text.
2. Identify details in the text that suggest the theme. (underline).
3. Determine the theme. (circle)

*Background: The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain is about a boy growing up along the Mississippi River. Tom's adventures include searching for stolen treasure, running away from home, and witnessing a murder, while trying to impress a girl and stay out of trouble.*

<sup>1</sup>Now appeared Joe Harper, similarly dressed and armed as Tom. <sup>2</sup>Tom called: "Hold! Who comes here into Sherwood Forest<sub>1</sub> without my pass?"

<sup>3</sup>The boys took their wooden swords, dumped their other things on the ground, struck a fencing<sub>2</sub> position and began a grave, careful combat.

*A few hours later...*

<sup>4</sup>The boys dressed themselves, hid their toys and weapons, and went off grieving that there were no outlaws any more, and wondering what modern civilization could claim to have done to compensate for their loss. <sup>5</sup>They said they would rather be outlaws a year in Sherwood Forest than President of the United States forever.

**1. Which sentence best suggests the theme?**

- A. Letting go of your childhood is hard.
- B. If you play with swords, you will become an outlaw.
- C. Life is not fun without any outlaws.

## Concept Closure

**Write an explanation.** Erin says the theme of the text about Tom Sawyer was that "Life is not fun without outlaws." Explain why she is incorrect.

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## Summary Closure

**What did you learn today about determining a theme through details in the text?**

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## Word Bank

theme  
 details  
 character  
 actions

**Read the text. Underline details in the text that suggest the theme. Determine the theme. (circle)**

*Background: The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain is about a boy growing up along the Mississippi River. Tom's adventures include searching for stolen treasure, running away from home, and witnessing a murder, while trying to impress a girl and stay out of trouble.*

### **The Adventures of Tom Sawyer**

<sup>1</sup>There was silence while the master was gathering his wrath. <sup>2</sup>Then he spoke: "Who tore this book?" <sup>3</sup>There was not a sound.

<sup>4</sup>The master called on students one by one looking for signs of guilt.

<sup>5</sup>Tom's uneasiness grew more intense as the questioning went on.

<sup>6</sup>Next was Becky Thatcher. <sup>7</sup>Tom felt hopeless. <sup>8</sup>He glanced at her face -- it was white with terror. <sup>9</sup>A thought shot like lightning through Tom's brain. <sup>10</sup>He sprang to his feet and shouted -- "I done it!"

<sup>11</sup>Tom stepped forward to go to his punishment. <sup>12</sup>The surprise and gratitude that shone upon him out of poor Becky's eyes seemed pay enough for a hundred floggings<sub>3</sub>. <sup>13</sup>He took the worst flogging<sub>4</sub> ever and also had to stay two hours after school -- but he knew who would wait for him outside. <sup>14</sup>Tom fell asleep that night with Becky's latest words lingering dreamily in his ear -- "Tom, how *could* you be so noble<sub>5</sub>!"

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

- A You are capable of more than you believe.
- B Sometimes we make sacrifices when in love.
- C Expressing your true feelings will get you in trouble.



## Listening

**Listen** to the text read aloud. Determine the best theme.

### 1. Which sentence would best be the theme of the text?

- A City life is better than a country lifestyle.
- B Be thankful for what you have; grass is not always greener on the other side.
- C When you work hard, you can accomplish great things.

### Identify which details support the theme.

- |   |  |     |    |
|---|--|-----|----|
| A | Once a little mouse who lived in the country invited a little mouse from the city to visit him.  | Yes | No |
| B | The City Mouse sat down to dinner; he was surprised to find that the Country Mouse had nothing to eat except barley and grain.                                       | Yes | No |
| C | "This is very terrible," said the Country Mouse; "let's not go back to the cupboard again."  | Yes | No |
| D | The very first place that the City Mouse took the Country Mouse was the kitchen cupboard of the house where he lived.  | Yes | No |
| E | The City Mouse took his little friend down the cellar stairs.  | Yes | No |
| F | "I think I will go home. I'd rather have barley and grain to eat and eat it in peace and comfort, than have brown sugar and cheese,—and be frightened all the time." | Yes | No |



## Reading

**Read the text.** Then answer questions about it.

**Beauty and the Beast** by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve

<sup>1</sup>Once upon a time a merchant picked a rose for his daughter named Beauty.  
<sup>2</sup>Instantly, out of the garden, sprang a horrible beast, wearing splendid clothes.  
<sup>3</sup>The Beast threatened to kill the merchant for taking the rose. <sup>4</sup>The merchant said it was for his daughter, and the Beast said, "I shall spare your life, if you bring me your daughter!" <sup>5</sup>Faced with certain death if he did not obey, the merchant promised.  
<sup>6</sup>When he reached home in tears, Beauty put his mind at rest.  
<sup>7</sup>"Dear father, I'd do anything for you! <sup>8</sup>Don't worry, you'll be able to keep your promise and save your life! <sup>9</sup>So Beauty was led to the castle, but the Beast was surprisingly pleasant to her.  
<sup>10</sup>At first, Beauty was frightened of the Beast. <sup>11</sup>Then she found her horror of it was gradually fading as time went by. <sup>12</sup>She had one of the finest rooms in the Castle.  
<sup>13</sup>Soon the Beast started to say a few kind words, until Beauty was amazed to discover that she was actually enjoying the conversation. <sup>14</sup>The days passed, and Beauty and the Beast became good friends.

**1. Which sentence would best be the theme of the text?**

- A Help your family at all times.
- B Be kind to strangers.
- C Good friends can be found where you least expect it.

**What details from the text suggest the theme?**

**Select other themes below that fit this story.**

**Defend your answers using details from the text. (orally)**

(answers may vary)

- A. Looks can be deceiving
- B. Treat people the way you want to be treated
- C. Never give up on your dreams
- D. Family is the most important thing
- E. Honesty is the best policy
- F. Don't judge people

 Writing

**Read the text. Write an explanation for the theme “Being patient is not always a good thing.” Use details from the text.**

**The Patient Cat** by Laura E. Richards

WHEN the spotted cat first found the nest, there was nothing in it, for it was only just finished. So she said, “I will wait!” for she was a patient cat, and the summer was before her. She waited a week, and then she climbed up again to the top of the tree, and peeped into the nest. There lay two lovely blue eggs, smooth and shining.

The spotted cat said, “Eggs may be good, but young birds are better. I will wait.” So she waited; and while she was waiting, she caught mice and rats, and washed herself and slept, and did all that a spotted cat should do to pass the time away.

When another week had passed, she climbed the tree again and peeped into the nest. This time there were five eggs. But the spotted cat said again, “Eggs may be good, but young birds are better. I will wait a little longer!”

So she waited a little longer and then went up again to look. Ah! there were five tiny birds, with big eyes and long necks, and yellow beaks wide open. Then the spotted cat sat down on the branch, and licked her nose and purred, for she was very happy. “It is worth while to be patient!” she said.

But when she looked again at the young birds, to see which one she should take first, she saw that they were very thin,—oh, very, very thin they were! The spotted cat had never seen anything so thin in her life.

“Now,” she said to herself, “if I were to wait only a few days longer, they would grow fat. Thin birds may be good, but fat birds are much better. I will wait!”

So she waited; and she watched the father-bird bringing worms all day long to the nest, and said, “Aha! they must be fattening fast! they will soon be as fat as I wish them to be. Aha! what a good thing it is to be patient.”

At last, one day she thought, “Surely, now they must be fat enough! I will not wait another day. Aha! how good they will be!”

So she climbed up the tree, licking her chops all the way and thinking of the fat young birds. And when she reached the top and looked into the nest, it was empty!!

Then the spotted cat sat down on the branch and spoke thus, “Well, of all the horrid, mean, ungrateful creatures I ever saw, those birds are the horriest, and the meanest, and the most ungrateful! Mi-a-u-ow!!!!”

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