

A **theme** is an idea or message about **life** or **human nature** in literary works.

▶ The **development of theme** can be analyzed through **specific details**:

- ▶ Character **actions** – what a character does or experiences.
- ▶ Character **thoughts** – what a character thinks.
- ▶ Character **words** – what a character says.

Background from *The Scarlet Letter*: Pearl's mother has been forced to wear a symbol, a "red letter" on her chest representing her sin. Pearl is realizing her mother is different because of this.

Theme: Sin is an unavoidable part of life for everyone.

1. "Mother," said little Pearl, "the sunshine does not love you. 2. It runs away and hides itself, because it is afraid of something on your chest. ... 3. "Stand you here, and let me run and catch it. 4. I am but a child. 5. It will not flee from me; for I wear nothing on my chest yet!"

6. "Nor ever will, my child, I hope," said Hester.

7. "And why not, mother?" asked Pearl, stopping short, just at the beginning of her race.
8. "Will not it come of its own accord, when I am a woman grown?"

Actions: Mother wears a symbol representing sin.

Thoughts: none.

Words: Pearl is just a child. She does not wear a symbol of sin yet. Pearl thinks that a symbol for sin automatically comes when one becomes an adult.

CFU

Which is the best example of the development of theme through specific details?
How do you know?

A The setting of a story takes place on a deserted island.

B A character gets rid of all he owns because he believes a simple life leads to happiness.

In your own words, what is theme? "Theme is _____."

- 1 Read the theme.
- 2 Identify specific details in the text that suggest theme. (underline)
- 3 Analyze the development of theme. (explain)

Theme: Death is easier than dealing with the misfortunes of life.

excerpt from *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

1 To be or not to be– that is the question:
 2 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 3 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 4 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
 5 And, by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep
 6 No more – and by a sleep to say we end
 7 The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
 8 That flesh is heir to – 'tis a consummation⁵
 9 Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep
 10 To sleep, perchance to dream.
 11 Ay, there's the rub,
 12 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
 13 When we have shuffled off this mortal⁶ coil,
 14 Must give us pause. There's the respect
 15 That makes calamity⁷ of so long life.

1. How do the character's actions, thoughts, or words develop the theme?
 - A by showing him thinking about the positives aspects of life.
 - B by discussing the needs of men.
 - C by showing him thinking about ending his life.
 - D by having him show his respect for life.
2. Explain how theme was developed using specific details from the text.

The theme is developed through _____.

Hamlet is torn between _____ the suffering, or taking

the easy way out by _____. These details suggest that

dying _____ than dealing with misfortune except for

having dreams.

- 1 Read the theme.
- 2 Identify specific details in the text that suggest theme. (underline)
- 3 Analyze the development of theme. (explain)

Theme: Being hopeful will help overcome life's obstacles.

from *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Anne Frank

1. "It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. 2. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.
3. It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. 4. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness. 5. I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too. 6. I feel the suffering of millions. 7. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more."
- July 15, 1944

1. How do the character's actions, thoughts, or words develop the theme?
 - A her thoughts show what sacrifice brings to people.
 - B despite horrible obstacles, Anne's entries remain positive.
 - C by having her say "It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals."
 - D by showing her commitment to writing in her journal.
2. Explain how theme was developed using specific details from the text.

The theme is developed through

Skill Closure

- 1 Read the theme.
- 2 Identify specific details in the text that suggest theme. (underline)
- 3 Analyze the development of theme. (explain)

Theme: People need love and companionship.

excerpt from *The Secret Garden* by Frances H. Burnett

1. Since she had been living in other people's houses, Mary had begun to feel lonely and to think odd thoughts which were new to her. 2. She had begun to wonder why she had never seemed to belong to anyone, even when her father and mother had been alive. 3. Other children seemed to belong to their fathers and mothers, but she had never seemed to really be anyone's little girl. 4. She had had servants, and food and clothes, but no one had taken any notice of her.

1. How do the character's actions, thoughts, or words develop the theme?
 - A by showing her thoughts about not belonging to anyone.
 - B by discussing the needs of young children.
 - C by having her run away from her home.
 - D by showing her crying over not having parents.
2. Explain how theme was developed using specific details from the text.

Concept Closure

 Writing

Write two sentences. Explain two ways how an author might develop the theme "hard work pays off."

Summary Closure

What did you learn today about analyzing the development of theme?

Word Bank

theme
message
specific
details
actions
words
thoughts

Read the theme and text, identify details that suggest the theme, and then analyze the development of the theme.

Theme: A guilty conscience haunts a person.

Background: When the police arrive to investigate reports of an old man's screaming, an unnamed man tries to "keep his cool" while being investigated. But he hears what he thinks is the old man's heart beating.

excerpt from **The Tell-Tale Heart** by Edgar Allan Poe

1. ...If, still, you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. 2. First of all, I dismembered the corpse. ... 4. I then took up three planks from the floor ..., and deposited all between the scantlings. 5. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, ...that no human eye ... could have detected anything wrong. ...

7. ..., there came a knocking at the street door. ...9. There entered three men, who introduced themselves ... as officers of the police. 10. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; ... and they had been deputed to search the premises.

11. No doubt I now grew very pale; - but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. 12. Yet the sound increased - and what could I do? 13. It was a low, dull, quick sound ... as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. ... 20. It grew louder --- louder! 21. And still the men chatted, ... 22. Was it possible they heard not? 23. Almighty God! - no, no! 24. They heard! - they suspected! - they knew! - they were making a mockery of my horror! 25. But anything was better than this agony! ... 27. I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! 28. I felt that I must scream or die! - and now - again! - hark! louder! louder! ... 29. "Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble₂ no more! 30. I admit the deed! - tear up the planks! - here, here! 31. It is the beating of his hideous heart!"

1. How do the character's actions, thoughts, or words develop the theme?

- A by having him make nervous movements.
- B by having him think he hears a beating heart over and over.
- C by having him think he could commit a crime and not get caught.
- D by showing him not cooperating with the police.

2. Explain how theme was developed using specific details from the text.

**Listening**

Answer these questions about the passage you just listened to.

- 1. Which statements from the text identify specific details that suggest theme?**
 - a. “over a square mile of space in the yards, and more than half of it is occupied by cattle pens;”
 - b. “It was near to the east entrance that they stood...”
 - c. “All night long this had been going on, and now the pens were full; by tonight they would all be empty, and the same thing would be done again.”
 - d. “By tonight,” Jokubas answered, “they will all be killed and cut up.”
 - e. “There were 250 miles of track within the yards.... ”

- 2. Which statements could be the theme for this text?**
 - a. Humans are more important than animals.
 - b. The reality of life can be brutal.

Read the theme and text, identify details that suggest the theme, and then analyze the development of the theme.

Theme: Even the thought of money can make people greedy.

The Lottery Ticket by Anton Chekhov

1. IVAN DMITRITCH, a middle-class man who lived with his family on an income of twelve hundred a year and was well satisfied with his lot, sat down after supper and began reading the newspaper. 2. "I forgot to look at the newspaper today," his wife said to him as she cleared the table. 3. "Look and see whether the list of drawings is there."

4. ... His wife looked at his astonished and panic-stricken face, and realized that he was not joking. "9,499?" she asked, turning pale... 5. "Yes, yes . . . it really is there!" 6. "And the number of the ticket?" 7. "Oh, yes!

10. The husband and wife began laughing and staring at one another in silence. 11. The possibility of winning bewildered them; they could not have dreamed what they both needed that 75,000 for, what they would buy, where they would go.

...13. Ivan stopped and looked at his wife. 14. "I should go abroad₁, you know, Masha," he said. 15. And he began thinking how nice it would be in late autumn to go abroad somewhere to the South of France . . . to Italy to India! 16. "I should certainly go abroad too," his wife said. 17. "But look at the number of the ticket!" 18. "Wait, wait! . . ."

19. He walked about the room and went on thinking. 20. It occurred to him: what if his wife really did go abroad? 21. It is pleasant to travel alone, ..., and not women such as think and talk all the journey about nothing but their children, sigh, and tremble with dismay over every farthing. 24. "She would begrudge₃ me every farthing₄," he thought, with a glance at his wife. 25. "The lottery ticket is hers, not mine! 26. Besides, what is the use of her going abroad? 27. What does she want there? . . .

... 30. And for the first time his mind dwelt on the fact that his wife had grown elderly and plain, and that she was saturated ... with the smell of cooking, while he was still young, fresh, and healthy, and might well have got married again.

31. "She knows nothing about money, and so she is stingy. 32. If she won it she would give me a 100 rubles, and put the rest away." 33. And he looked at his wife, not with a smile now, but with hatred. 34. She glanced at him too, and also with hatred and anger. 35. She had her own daydreams, her own plans, her own reflections; she understood very well what her husband's dreams were. 36. She knew who would be the first to grab her winnings. 37. "It's very nice making daydreams at other people's expense!" is what her eyes expressed.

38. "No, don't you dare!" 39. Her husband understood her look; hatred began stirring again in his breast, and in order to annoy his wife he glanced quickly, to spite her, at the fourth page of the newspaper and read out triumphantly: "Series 9,499, number 46! Not 26!"

40. Hatred and hope both disappeared at once, and it began immediately to seem to Ivan and his wife that their rooms were dark and small..., that the supper they had been eating was not doing them good, ...that the evenings were long and wearisome. . .

Read the theme and text, identify details that suggest the theme, and then analyze the development of the theme.

Theme: Even the thought of money can make people greedy.

The Lottery Ticket by Anton Chekhov

1. How do the character's actions, thoughts, or words develop the theme?
 - A by having Masha sad about her husband having the winning ticket.
 - B by having Ivan be happy about the winning ticket and dream about what to do with the money.
 - C by having Ivan think resentful thoughts about his wife and not want to share the money with her.
 - D by showing Ivan waiting before revealing the last lottery number.
2. Explain how theme was developed using specific details from the text.



Reading

Read the text. Decide which themes best fit each story.

- A. Never give up on your dreams.
 B. Strong family bonds and values can survive adversity.
 C. Possessing many skills will help you in tough situations.
 D. Growing up is a challenge for everyone.
 E. Unconditional love can withstand any obstacle.
 F. Staying positive during tough times is the best way to survive.
 G. Taking a risk for the greater good makes one brave.
 H. True friends will always look out for each other.

The Book Thief by Marcus Zusak

It is 1939. Nazi Germany. The country is holding its breath. Death has never been busier, and will become busier still. Liesel Meminger is a foster girl living outside of Munich, who scratches out a meager existence for herself by stealing when she encounters something she can't resist—books. With the help of her accordion-playing foster father, she learns to read and shares her stolen books with her neighbors during bombing raids as well as with the Jewish man hidden in her basement.

Themes:

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

They are an unlikely pair: George is "small and quick and dark of face"; Lennie, a man of tremendous size, has the mind of a young child. Yet they have formed a "family," clinging together in the face of loneliness and alienation. Laborers in California's dusty vegetable fields, they hustle work when they can, living a hand-to-mouth existence. For George and Lennie have a plan: to own an acre of land and a shack they can call their own. When they land jobs on a ranch in the Salinas Valley, the fulfillment of their dream seems to be within their grasp. But even George cannot guard Lennie from the provocations of a flirtatious woman, nor predict the consequences of Lennie's unswerving obedience to the things George taught him.

Themes:

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan

In 1949 a group of Chinese women, recent immigrants to San Francisco, begin meeting to eat dim sum, play games, and talk. Four mothers, four daughters, four families whose histories shift with the four winds depending on who's telling the stories. United in shared loss and hope, they call themselves the Joy Luck Club. Rather than sink into tragedy, they come together to raise their spirits and make money. As each woman reveals her secrets, trying to unravel the truth about her life, the strings become more tangled. Mothers brag or despair over daughters, and daughters roll their eyes even as they feel the connection among them all growing stronger. Family relationships can be challenging, tender, and sometimes painful, but the deep connection between mothers and daughters will always exist.

Themes:

The Looking Glass by Anton Chekhov

Full text of **The Looking Glass** by Anton Chekhov is online at this link.

<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/chekhov/anton/horse-stealers/chapter6.html>

Theme: It's better to live each day than obsess about the future.

1. How do the character's actions, thoughts, or words develop the theme?
 - A by showing Nellie's willingness to dream day and night about getting married.
 - B by expressing Nellie's desire and anticipation about getting married.
 - C by having Nellie wake up, relieved that her tragic images were all just a dream.
 - D by showing Nellie's desperation while begging the doctor to help her dying husband.
2. Explain how theme was developed using specific details from the text.

Background: Nellie constantly dreams about when she will finally get married. Her dreams become so vivid that she begins to visualize her future being played out in the reflection of her looking-glass.

The Most Dangerous Game by Richard Connell

Theme: Violence can sometimes be both physical and psychological.

Fill in the graphic organizer with examples from the text showing how the characters' actions, thoughts, and words develop the theme.

	Rainsford	General Zaroff
Actions		
Thoughts		
Words		

2. Explain how theme was developed using specific details from the text.

Background: Rainsford, a big-game hunter, falls off a boat and swims to an isolated island in the Caribbean where he is at first welcomed, and then hunted by an aristocrat named General Zaroff.

Full text of **The Most Dangerous Game** can be found online at the link below.

http://fiction.eserver.org/short/the_most_dangerous_game.html

Answer the following questions.

1. Learning this theme in texts, *Individuals revolt against social conformity*, will help you understand which modern situations?

A How teens transform into adults	Yes No
B How individuals find their own greatness in life	Yes No
C How laws and rules create stress for people	Yes No
D How to create better relationships	Yes No

2. Learning this theme in texts, *Man is often inhumane to his fellow man*, will help you understand which modern situations?

A How bullies influence their victims	Yes No
B How immigration laws and enforcement affect families	Yes No
C How people survive in nature	Yes No
D How prejudice and discrimination operate in the workplace	Yes No

3. Learning this theme in texts, *Man seeks order, beauty, and truth in life*, will help you understand which modern situations?

A How artists and musicians create great works	Yes No
B How activists persist in their cause to make things better	Yes No
C How pollution influences our life	Yes No
D How scientific discoveries are made	Yes No