

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

► The **development of theme** can be analyzed through characters' **actions**, **thoughts**, and **words**.

**Background:** In *The Scarlet Letter*, Pearl notices her mother is different because she wears a red letter on her chest, symbolizing her sin.

**Theme:** Sin<sub>3</sub> is an unavoidable part of life for everyone.

**Actions – what characters do.**

**Thoughts – what characters think about life, themselves, or others.**

**Words – what characters says.**

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

<sup>6</sup>Nor ever will, my child, I hope,” said Hester. <sup>7</sup>“And why not, mother?” asked Pearl, stopping short, just at the beginning of her race. <sup>8</sup>“Will not it come of its own accord, when I am a woman grown?”

### CFU

Which develops the theme through the characters? Explain.

**A A young person gradually changes their beliefs after experiencing several hardships and meeting people with different perspectives.**

**B Two friends face a moral dilemma that tests their loyalty, forcing them to choose between honesty and protecting each other.**

Which develops the theme through the character's thoughts? Explain.

**A "I can't stop thinking about what they'll say if I fail. Everyone will laugh at me. They'll think I'm worthless, just like last time. Maybe I shouldn't even try."**

**B "At first I only thought about what I wanted. Now I wonder how my actions affect others. Perhaps true happiness isn't about getting my way, but understanding what others need."**

Which develops the theme through the character's words? Explain.

**A I once believed wealth would make me happy. Now I know better. Money bought me everything except what truly matters - love and peace of mind.**

**B Truth isn't always kind, but lies are never loving. I promised to be honest with you no matter how difficult, because that's what real respect looks like.**

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 consummation<sup>5</sup>  
 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 mortal coil,  
 14 Must give us pause. There's the respect  
 15 That makes calamity 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.

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**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.

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## 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 *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo

<sup>1</sup>Since he had been alone, little Cosette had begun to feel a void in her heart that was unfamiliar to her. <sup>2</sup>She had begun to wonder why she had never known true affection, even when surrounded by the Thénardiens. <sup>3</sup>Other children seemed to receive kindness from their parents, but she had never experienced such tenderness. <sup>4</sup>She had had chores and duties, and clothes upon her back, but no one had ever shown her genuine care.

1. How do the character's actions, thoughts, or words develop the theme?
  - A by showing Cosette performing duties for others
  - B through Cosette's direct statements about wanting friends
  - C by contrasting her situation with children with parents
  - D through Cosette's thoughts about her loneliness and lack of affection from others

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

 Writing

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

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## Summary Closure

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

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## Word Bank

theme  
message  
specific  
details  
actions  
words  
thoughts

**Read the theme and 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

<sup>1</sup>...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. <sup>2</sup>First of all, I dismembered the corpse. ... <sup>3</sup>I then took up three planks from the floor ..., and deposited all between the scantlings. <sup>4</sup>I then replaced the boards so cleverly, ...that no human eye ... could have detected anything wrong. ...

<sup>5</sup>..., there came a knocking at the door. ...<sup>6</sup>There entered three men, who introduced themselves ... as police. <sup>7</sup>A shriek had been heard.

<sup>8</sup>No doubt I now grew very pale; - but I talked more fluently. <sup>9</sup>Yet the sound increased. <sup>10</sup>It was a low, dull, quick sound ... as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. ... <sup>11</sup>It grew louder --- louder! <sup>12</sup>And still the men chatted, .... <sup>13</sup>Was it possible they heard not? <sup>14</sup>Almighty God! - no, no! <sup>15</sup>They heard! - they suspected! - they knew!

**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.

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**Reading****Read the text. Decide which themes best fit the 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 ZusakThemes:  

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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.

**Answer the following questions.**

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

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

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**Of Mice and Men** by John SteinbeckThemes:  

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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.

**Answer the following questions.**

2. The theme, *The pursuit of personal identity shapes one's destiny*, 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



## Reading

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

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**The Joy Luck Club** by Amy Tan

Themes: \_\_\_\_\_

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.

Answer the following questions.

3. The theme, *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 |