

Share What You Know

What Are Life's Lessons?
The Power of Life's Lessons

Learn the Skill

What Can Literature Teach Us?

Topic vs. Theme

Clues That Reveal Theme

How to Identify Theme

- Step 1: Track the Clues
- Step 2: Infer Theme

Tips for Analyzing Theme

Practice & Apply

Fable

- Track the Clues
- Infer Theme

Poem

- Track the Clues
- Infer Theme

Review Games

- Wing It
- Spin a Theme
- Tic-Tac-Toe



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT





Copyright © Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

[Extend Page](#)

What Are Life's Lessons?

We often learn lessons from our experiences.

Listen to the scenarios, and list the lessons they might teach.

Scenario	Possible Lessons
 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People don't always get what they want.• One door closes and another opens.
 	



[Extend Page](#)

The Power of Life's Lessons

As you've discovered, the experiences you have and observe can help you gain important insights into life and human nature.



Thinking about life's lessons can help you:

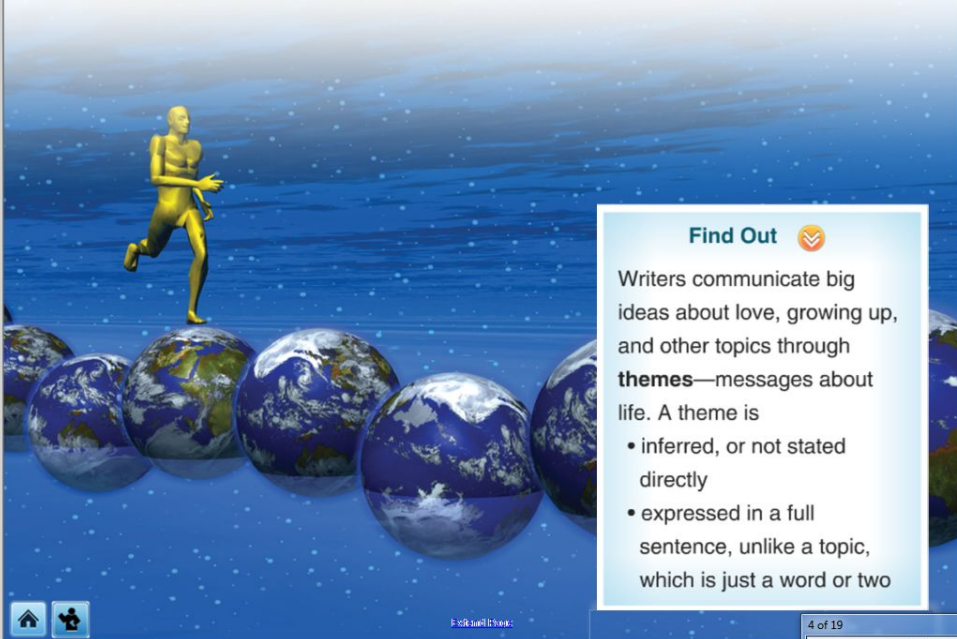
- 1 understand your behavior and the behavior of others
- 2 make sense of things that happen
- 3 make more informed decisions
- 4 keep negative experiences or events in perspective
- 5 feel reassured that you're not alone



Exit and Close

3 of 19

What Can Literature Teach Us?



Find Out

Writers communicate big ideas about love, growing up, and other topics through **themes**—messages about life. A theme is

- inferred, or not stated directly
- expressed in a full sentence, unlike a topic, which is just a word or two



Exit and Close

4 of 19

Topic vs. Theme

Remember that a topic is expressed in a word or two, but it takes a complete sentence to communicate a theme.

Draw on your knowledge to come up with themes that relate to each topic.



Scenario	Possible Themes
first impressions	Example: Things are not always as they seem.
war	Example: War is not the answer.
change	
success	


[Extend Page](#)

5 of 19

Topic vs. Theme

Remember that a topic is expressed in a word or two, but it takes a complete sentence to communicate a theme.

Draw on your knowledge to come up with themes that relate to each topic.



Scenario	Possible Themes
first impressions	Example: Things are not always as they seem. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can't erase a first impression. • First impressions can't be trusted.
war	Example: War is not the answer. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • War can produce unlikely heroes. • There's no glory in war.
change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can't change other people. • Good change can still be painful.
success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure is part of success. • Luck plays a factor in success.


[Extend Page](#)

17 of 19

Clues That Reveal Theme

Explore clues that reveal theme.

Clues to Theme

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting



Clues to Theme

Most themes are not directly stated. You have to **infer**, or guess, the theme(s) by looking at certain clues.

Example: In “The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs,” a countryman and his wife have a goose that lays one golden egg each day. This is not enough for the couple. They believe the goose is made of gold and decide to kill it—to get all the gold. They open up the dead goose and discover . . . nothing.



[Extend Page](#)

6 of 19

Clues That Reveal Theme

Explore clues that reveal theme.

Clues to Theme

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

Title

The **title** may reflect a story’s topic, its theme, or both. Ask yourself:

- What does each word in the title mean?
- What ideas does the title emphasize?

The title, “The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs,” tells you that the goose is an important part of the story, but you still need more information to uncover the theme.

The se That Laid the lden Eggs



[Extend Page](#)

6 of 19

Clues That Reveal Theme

Explore clues that reveal theme.

Clues to Theme

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

Plot and Conflict

A story's **plot** often revolves around a conflict that relates to a theme.

Ask yourself:

- What conflicts do the characters face?
- How are the conflicts resolved?
- How are readers supposed to feel about the resolution?

The characters create their own conflict: They are unhappy because the goose is not laying eggs fast enough. Their attempt to resolve the conflict—killing the goose—only makes their situation worse.



[Extend Page](#)

6 of 19

Clues That Reveal Theme

Explore clues that reveal theme.

Clues to Theme

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

Characters

What **characters** do, say, and learn can reflect a theme. Ask yourself:

- What are the main characters like?
- How do they change as a result of the conflict?
- What lessons do they learn?

The husband and wife are greedy. The text does not say whether the couple changes or learns a lesson, but they certainly have to deal with the consequences of their actions!



[Extend Page](#)

6 of 19

Clues That Reveal Theme

Explore clues that reveal theme.

Clues to Theme

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting



Setting

A **setting** can suggest theme through its effects on the characters and on the events of the story. Ask yourself:

- How does the setting influence the characters?
 - What might the setting represent?
- In this case, we know only that the setting is in the country. In other stories, setting plays a bigger role.



[Extend Page](#)

6 of 19

Track the Clues

You will identify the themes of "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" in two steps.

First, examine the clues in the text, using the questions as a guide.

Original Text

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

"The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson"

retold by Leo Tolstoy

The grandfather had become very old. His legs would not carry him, his eyes could not see, his ears could not hear, and he was toothless. When he ate, bits of food sometimes dropped out of his mouth. His son and his son's wife no longer allowed him to eat with them at the table. He had to eat his meals in the corner near the stove.

One day they gave him his food in a bowl. He tried to



[Extend Page](#)

7 of 19

Track the Clues

You will identify the themes of "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" in two steps.

First, examine the clues in the text, using the questions as a guide.

Original Text

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

One day they gave him his food in a bowl. He tried to move the bowl closer; it fell to the floor and broke. His daughter-in-law scolded him. She told him that he spoiled everything in the house and broke their dishes, and she said that from now on he would get his food in a wooden dish. The old man sighed and said nothing.

A few days later, the old man's son and his wife were sitting in their hut, resting and watching their little boy playing on the floor. They saw him putting together something out of small pieces of wood. His father asked him, "What are you



[Extend Page](#)

7 of 19

Track the Clues

You will identify the themes of "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" in two steps.

First, examine the clues in the text, using the questions as a guide.

Original Text

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

small pieces of wood. His father asked him, "What are you making, Misha?"

The little grandson said, "I'm making a wooden bucket. When you and Mamma get old, I'll feed you out of this wooden dish."

The young peasant and his wife looked at each other and tears filled their eyes. They were ashamed because they had treated the old grandfather so meanly, and from that day they again let the old man eat with them at the table and took better care of him.



[Extend Page](#)

7 of 19

Track the Clues

You will identify the themes of "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" in two steps.

First, examine the clues in the text, using the questions as a guide.

Original Text

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

What can you learn from the title? Can you find any possible meaning beyond the topic? Explain.

"The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson"
retold by Leo Tolstoy

The grandfather had become very old. His legs would not carry him, his eyes could not see, his ears could not hear, and he was toothless. When he ate, bits of food sometimes dropped out of his mouth. His son and his son's wife no longer allowed him to eat with them at the table. He had to eat his meals in the corner near the stove.

One day they gave him his food in a bowl. He tried to

[Extend Page](#)

7 of 19

Track the Clues

You will identify the themes of "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" in two steps.

First, examine the clues in the text, using the questions as a guide.

Original Text

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

Reread the highlighted text. What is the main conflict? How is it resolved?

dropped out of his mouth. His son and his son's wife no longer allowed him to eat with them at the table. He had to eat his meals in the corner near the stove.

One day they gave him his food in a bowl. He tried to move the bowl closer; it fell to the floor and broke. His daughter-in-law scolded him. She told him that he spoiled everything in the house and broke their dishes, and she said that from now on he would get his food in a wooden dish. The old man sighed and said nothing.

A few days later, the old man's son and his wife were

[Extend Page](#)

7 of 19

Track the Clues

You will identify the themes of "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" in two steps.

First, examine the clues in the text, using the questions as a guide.

Original Text

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

Reread the highlighted text. What is the main conflict? How is it resolved?

small pieces of wood. His father asked him, "What are you making, Misha?"

The little grandson said, "I'm making a wooden bucket. When you and Mamma get old, I'll feed you out of this wooden dish."

The young peasant and his wife looked at each other and tears filled their eyes. They were ashamed because they had treated the old grandfather so meanly, and from that day they again let the old man eat with them at the table and took better care of him.

[Extend Page](#)

7 of 19

Track the Clues

You will identify the themes of "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" in two steps.

First, examine the clues in the text, using the questions as a guide.

Original Text

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

What are the son and his wife like at the beginning of the story? How and why do they change by the end?

"The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson"
retold by Leo Tolstoy

The grandfather had become very old. His legs would not carry him, his eyes could not see, his ears could not hear, and he was toothless. When he ate, bits of food sometimes dropped out of his mouth. His son and his son's wife no longer allowed him to eat with them at the table. He had to eat his meals in the corner near the stove.

One day they gave him his food in a bowl. He tried to

[Extend Page](#)

7 of 19

Track the Clues

You will identify the themes of "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" in two steps.

First, examine the clues in the text, using the questions as a guide.

Original Text

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

What are the son and his wife like at the beginning of the story? How and why do they change by the end?

move the bowl closer; it fell to the floor and broke. His daughter-in-law scolded him. She told him that he spoiled everything in the house and broke their dishes, and she said that from now on he would get his food in a wooden dish. The old man sighed and said nothing.

A few days later, the old man's son and his wife were sitting in their hut, resting and watching their little boy playing on the floor. They saw him putting together something out of small pieces of wood. His father asked him, "What are you making, Misha?"

[Extend Page](#)

7 of 19

Track the Clues

You will identify the themes of "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" in two steps.

First, examine the clues in the text, using the questions as a guide.

Original Text

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

What are the son and his wife like at the beginning of the story? How and why do they change by the end?

small pieces of wood. His father asked him, "What are you making, Misha?"

The little grandson said, "I'm making a wooden bucket. When you and Mamma get old, I'll feed you out of this wooden dish."

The young peasant and his wife looked at each other and tears filled their eyes. They were ashamed because they had treated the old grandfather so meanly, and from that day they again let the old man eat with them at the table and took better care of him.

[Extend Page](#)

7 of 19

Track the Clues

You will identify the themes of "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" in two steps.

First, examine the clues in the text, using the questions as a guide.

Original Text

Title

Plot and Conflict

Characters

Setting

What does the setting tell you about this family? How might the setting affect the couple's behavior?

"The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson"

retold by Leo Tolstoy

The grandfather had become very old. His legs would not carry him, his eyes could not see, his ears could not hear, and he was toothless. When he ate, bits of food sometimes dropped out of his mouth. His son and his son's wife no longer allowed him to eat with them at the table. He had to eat his meals in the corner near the stove.

One day they gave him his food in a bowl. He tried to



[Extend Page](#)

7 of 19

Infer Theme

Use the clues you noticed as you read "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson" to infer possible themes of the story. Click all that apply.



Treat others the way you would like to be treated.

If you try hard enough, you can improve your situation.

Youth doesn't last forever.

Your actions are often a model for others.

Yes! At the end of the tale, the couple is "ashamed." They realize that they would not like to be treated "so meanly."



[Extend Page](#)

8 of 19

Tips for Analyzing Theme

Use these sentence frames to infer the themes of a novel or short story you've read recently.

The text _____ is about the topic _____.

The title tells me _____.

The conflict focuses on _____. It is resolved when _____.

The main characters have these personality traits: _____.

By the end of the text, they learn _____.

The story is set _____. The setting influences the characters by _____.

Using the clues in the story, I can infer the following themes: _____.

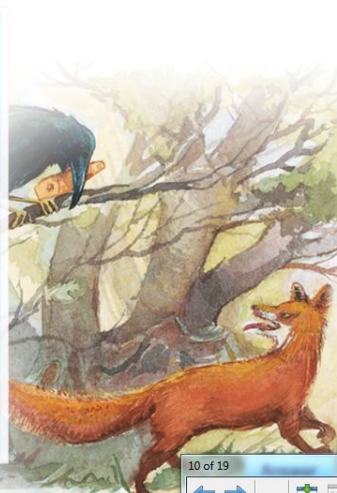


Track the Clues in a Fable

Fables teach a **moral**, or lesson. In this fable, "The Fox and the Crow" by Aesop, what lessons can you infer?

Highlight the clues that tell you about Fox's character. Underline the clues that tell you about Crow's character.

A Crow sat on a branch of a tree with a piece of cheese in her beak when a Fox saw her and set his wits to discover some way of getting the cheese. Standing under the tree he looked up and said, "What a noble bird I see! Her beauty is without equal, the hue of her plumage exquisite. If only her voice is as sweet as her looks are fair, she ought to be Queen of the Birds." The Crow was hugely flattered by this, and just to show the Fox that she could sing she gave a loud caw. Down came the cheese, and the Fox, while snatching it up, said, "You have a voice, madam, I see: what you want is wits."



Track the Clues in a Fable

Fables teach a **moral**, or lesson. In this fable, "The Fox and the Crow" by Aesop, what lessons can you infer?

Highlight the clues that tell you about Fox's character. Underline the clues that tell you about Crow's character.

A Crow sat on a branch of a tree with a piece of cheese in her beak when a Fox saw her and set his wits to discover some way of getting the cheese. Standing under the tree he looked up and said, "What a noble bird I see! Her beauty is without equal, the hue of her plumage exquisite. If only her voice is as sweet as her looks are fair, she ought to be Queen of the Birds." The Crow was hugely flattered by this, and just to show the Fox that she could sing she gave a loud caw. Down came the cheese, and the Fox, while snatching it up, said, "You have a voice, madam, I see: what you want is wits."



[Extend Page](#)

18 of 19

Infer Theme in a Fable

Determine a theme of "The Fox and the Crow" by dragging the correct sentence ending into place. Then identify another theme on your own.

One way to state the theme of this fable is:

Don't believe all you hear.

Crows are beautiful.

That's it! The Crow was tricked by the Fox's flattering words, and so lost her cheese. She should have been suspicious of him.

Flattery will get you nowhere.

Beauty is better than brains.

Reread the Fable



[Extend Page](#)

11 of 19

Track the Clues in a Poem

Highlight details that tell you about the speaker's actions.
Then answer the question.



"Your World"

by Georgia Douglas Johnson

Your world is as big as you make it
I know, for I used to abide
In the narrowest nest in a corner
My wings pressing close to my side

But I sighted the distant horizon
Where the sky-line encircled the sea
And I throbbed with a burning desire
To travel this immensity.

How does the speaker change by the poem's end?



[Extend Page](#)

12 of 19



Track the Clues in a Poem

Highlight details that tell you about the speaker's actions.
Then answer the question.



In the narrowest nest in a corner
My wings pressing close to my side

But I sighted the distant horizon
Where the sky-line encircled the sea
And I throbbed with a burning desire
To travel this immensity.

I battered the cordons around me
And cradled my wings on the breeze
Then soared to the uttermost reaches
with rapture, with power, with ease!

How does the speaker change by the poem's end?



[Extend Page](#)

12 of 19



Track the Clues in a Poem

Highlight details that tell you about the speaker's actions. Then answer the question.

"Your World"

by Georgia Douglas Johnson

Your world is as big as you make it
I know, for I **used to abide**
In the narrowest nest in a corner
My wings pressing close to my side

But I **sighted the distant horizon**
Where the sky-line encircled the sea
And I **throbbled with a burning desire**
To travel this immensity.



How does the speaker change by the poem's end?

- She used to stay "in the narrowest nest."
- After she saw new possibilities in "the distant horizon," she fought her fears.
- She eventually pushed herself to "soar to the uttermost reaches."



[Extend Page](#)

19 of 19

Infer Theme in a Poem

A **metaphor** describes one thing in terms of another, without using the words "like" or "as." Here, the poet compares the speaker to a bird.

Decide which themes are supported by details in the poem. Then click to check your answers.

✘ Sorry, no. The poet uses the bird as a metaphor to help you understand the speaker's behavior.

✔ This is a theme of the poem. The speaker learns that there's more to the world than her "narrowest nest."

✔ Yes! The speaker decides on her own to fight her fears and soar "to the uttermost reaches."

✘ No, this poem encourages readers to challenge themselves and soar "to the uttermost reaches."

Reread the Poem



[Extend Page](#)

13 of 19

Wing It

Read the poem on the pull tab. Then use the questions to analyze the meaning of the poem.

Read the Poem



What is the relationship between “drops of water”/“grains of sand” and “ocean”/“land”?



What is the relationship between the “little minutes” and the “mighty ages / Of eternity”?



What message or theme does the poet communicate about “little things”?



Why might the poet have chosen the title “Little Things”?



[Extend Page](#)

14 of 19

Wing It

Read the poem on the pull tab. Then use the questions to analyze the meaning of the poem.

Read the Poem



Immense things, such as oceans and Earth, are made up of countless smaller things.



Though they are short, minutes add up to become an endless amount of time (eternity).



They may seem small or inconsequential, but little things in life matter more than people think.



The poet might have chosen the title to emphasize the importance of “little things.”



[Extend Page](#)

14 of 19