



Growing Themes

Theme



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Published by K20 Center

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Grade Level	7th – 11th Grade	Time Frame	1-3 class period(s)
Subject	English/Language Arts	Duration	90 minutes
Course	A.P. Literature and Composition, American Literature, British Literature, World Literature		

Essential Question

What universal themes are found within and across various genres?

Summary

In this lesson, students will learn to effectively identify and analyze themes through and across a variety of texts through a variety of engaging activities. Students will explore universal theme sets through the Four Corners and Always, Sometimes, Never strategies before composing their own theme statements. Students will then transpose the theme sets to text through a guided Why-Lighting activity. Finally, students will apply their knowledge of theme by examining themes present in nonfiction texts. While this lesson is currently aligned only to 8th grade standards, it would be appropriate to teach in grades 7-11, adjusting standards as needed.

Snapshot

Engage

Students engage in a modified Four Corners strategy to explore dichotomous theme statements.

Explore

Students reflect on pairs of theme words and create their own theme statements related to the theme words.

Explain

Students use the Why-Lighting strategy to annotate a text for evidence of the theme word sets.

Extend

Students apply their knowledge of theme by exploring and annotating a nonfiction article.

Evaluate

Students reflect on their annotated texts and use the 3-2-1 strategy to create a theme statement applicable to both texts.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts (Grade 8)

8.3.R.3: Students will analyze how authors use key literary elements to contribute to the meaning of a text:

- setting
- plot
- characters (i.e., protagonist, antagonist)
- characterization
- theme
- conflict (i.e., internal and external)

8.3.R.7: Students will make connections (e.g., thematic links, literary analysis) between and across multiple texts and provide textual evidence to support their inferences.

Attachments

- [Lesson-Slides-Growing-Themes.pptx](#)
- [The-Outsiders-Passages-Growing-Themes - Spanish.docx](#)
- [The-Outsiders-Passages-Growing-Themes - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [The-Outsiders-Passages-Growing-Themes.docx](#)
- [The-Outsiders-Passages-Growing-Themes.pdf](#)
- [Theme-Flowers-Blank-Petals-Growing-Themes - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Theme-Flowers-Blank-Petals-Growing-Themes - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Theme-Flowers-Blank-Petals-Growing-Themes.docx](#)
- [Theme-Flowers-Blank-Petals-Growing-Themes.pdf](#)
- [Theme-Flowers-Master-Document-Growing-Themes.docx](#)
- [Theme-Flowers-Master-Document-Growing-Themes.pdf](#)
- [Theme-Set-Room-Labels-Growing-Themes - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Theme-Set-Room-Labels-Growing-Themes - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Theme-Set-Room-Labels-Growing-Themes.docx](#)
- [Theme-Set-Room-Labels-Growing-Themes.pdf](#)

Materials

- Computer
- Wifi or Internet
- Projector
- Tape
- Highlighters: pink, yellow, blue, and green
- Writing utensils and paper
- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Newsela articles (linked in the Extend section)
- Theme Flowers Master Document (attached; one copy of "Courage & Fear" and "Isolation & Acceptance" per student)
- Theme Flowers Blank Petals (attached; one copy of "Love & Hate" and "Loyalty & Betrayal" per student)
- The Outsiders Passages (attached; one per student)
- Theme Set Room Labels (attached)

Engage

Teacher's Note: Set-Up

Statements that relate to courage and fear will be read first, and then statements that relate to acceptance and isolation will be read after. The walls can be labeled with only one set at a time, or utilize all four walls if it would be less confusing for students.

Display **slide 3**. Project the essential question as the students enter the room and share it with them once they are settled: *What universal themes are found within and across various genres?*

Display **slide 4** and share the learning objectives with your students:

1. Students should analyze theme statements.
2. Students should write theme statements.
3. Students should synthesize information to create overall theme statements based on two genres of text.

Display **slide 5** and explain that, to begin the lesson, they are participating in a modified [Four Corners](#) and [Always, Sometimes, or Never True](#) activity. Explain to the students that you are going to read a series of sentences which could summarize the theme of a story, and they are going to have to decide whether that theme statement reflects courage or fear or both.

Theme statements are displayed individually on a slide. When you read them, students will quickly decide whether they believe the statement expresses courage, fear, or both and either move to the appropriate room label or stand in the middle of the room if they feel it could reflect both theme statements.

- "A spark can start a great fire." -Emmet Fox (**slide 6**)
- "Fear makes the wolf bigger than he is." -German Proverb (**slide 7**)
- "If you are afraid of something, you give it power over you." -Unknown (**slide 8**)
- "It is easy to be brave from a distance." -Aesop (**slide 9**)
- "A bully is always a coward." -Unknown (**slide 10**)
- "Courage is not the absence of fear, it is the conquest of it." -William Danforth (**slide 11**)

Once students have moved, have them discuss their decision within their group and then have each group share with the class their reason for their decision.

Display **slide 12** and inform students they are going to play again, only this time they should decide whether the theme is acceptance, isolation, or a combination of both.

- "Tolerance is giving to every other human being, every right which you claim for yourself." -Ingersoll (**slide 13**)
- "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." -Unknown (**slide 14**)
- "Happiness can exist only in acceptance." -George Orwell (**slide 15**)
- "A man is known by the company he keeps." -Aesop (**slide 16**)
- "The worst loneliness is not being comfortable with yourself." -Mark Twain (**slide 17**)
- "No man is an island." -John Donne (**slide 18**)

Teacher's Note

If students are virtual, use Google Docs with four columns, one for the quote, and one each for titles: courage, fear, both. The next set would include one for the quote and one each for the titles: acceptance, isolation, both. Students should put their initials in the box they would choose and explain why they chose that title.

Explore

Teacher's Note

There are two documents located under "Attachments" for this activity. One is "Theme Flowers Blank Petals" that contain the four pairs of theme words with blank petals. The other is "Theme Petals Master Document" that has theme statements filled out. Use these to assist students during this activity or to provide examples of possible theme statements. If students need a challenge, you can simply distribute the blank petals for all pairs and have them think back on the last activity. Go with what works best for the students.

Have students return to their seats and explain that they are going to examine theme word sets in order to create their own theme statements. Pass out **"Theme Flowers Blank Petals"** handout labeled **"Love & Hate"** and **"Loyalty & Betrayal."** Also, pass out the completed **"Courage & Fear"** and **"Acceptance & Isolation"** flowers from the handout **"Theme Flowers Master Document"** to be used for reference (these contain the theme statements used in the activity during the Engage portion of the lesson).

Display **slide 19** and share the example theme statements for Love and Hate. Ask students if they have any examples they could provide. This slide has a spot to include student examples as they share out.

Explain to students that the theme statements they create can be familiar quotes, can be based off of familiar stories, or can be created independently. Students should write three theme statements for each of the four words, resulting in 12 total statements.

Example Love/Hate Theme Statements

"Hatred is blind, as well as love." - Oscar Wilde / "Love is the absence of judgment." - Dalai Lama / "Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light." - Helen Keller / "Where there is great love, there are always miracles." - Willa Cather / "Anger and hatred hinder good counsel." / "In time, we hate that which we often fear." - William Shakespeare

Teacher's Note

Students may need to research statements and/or quotes online to help them engage in the creative process. Allowing them to use one or two famous sayings/quotes could help them then create their own statements.

Adaptations And Modifications

Some students may need to work in pairs or small groups to create their statements. As a challenge, have students create two statements for each of the words as well as two statements which could fit both words. For example, the quote "The strength of a family, like the strength of an army, lies in its loyalty to each other" by Mario Puzo could reflect loyalty or betrayal depending upon the situation.

Display **slide 20** and share the example theme statements for Loyalty and Betrayal. Ask students if they have any examples they could provide. This slide has a slot to include student examples as they share out.

Example Loyalty/betrayal Theme Statements

"You don't earn loyalty in a day. You earn it day-by-day." - Jeffrey Gitomer / "Trust can take years to build, but only a second to break." / "It is easier to forgive an enemy than to forgive a friend." - William Blake / "The strength of a family, like the strength of an army, lies in its loyalty to each other." - Mario Puzo / "Loyalty is what we seek in friendship." - Cicero / "Lack of loyalty is one of the major causes of failure in every walk of life." - Napoleon Hill

When students have finished their statements, have them share out with the rest of the class. **Slides 19-20** have a spot to include student examples as they share out.

Explain

Display **slide 21** and pass out "**The Outsiders Passages.**"

Explain to students that they should look for examples of the theme words within the passage. These examples could be a part of the plot or the setting, or they could be something the characters do, say, or think.

Using the [Why-Lighting](#) strategy, have students annotate the text for the four theme word sets.

1. Students read through the text and highlight examples of the theme sets. This could be dialogue, characters' thoughts and actions, the narrative, or a combination of elements. Some elements could represent multiple theme word sets.
 2. Assign a highlighter color for each set.
 3. After highlighting the element(s) with the appropriate color, students should clarify which theme word it best represents by writing the appropriate theme word in the margin.
- Pink: Love/Hate
 - Yellow: Loyalty/Betrayal
 - Blue: Acceptance/Isolation
 - Green: Courage/Fear

Teacher's Note

It is helpful to model the activity before students engage independently. Pick out one or two examples and discuss why you chose them and which theme word they represent. Then, have a few students provide an example and explain why they chose them and which theme word they represent.

After students have finished annotating the passage, display **slide 22** and have them analyze their annotations to determine the overall theme of the passage. Typically, a quick glance at which color is most prominent can tell them the overall theme.

Adaptations And Modifications

For struggling students, identifying one theme word may be challenging. As a challenge, have students select or write a theme statement which best summarizes the theme of the passage.

Extend

Display **slide 23**. Explain to students that theme can be found across all genres, including nonfiction texts. Provide a variety of current news articles from [Newsela](#) for students to review. As students are skimming and reviewing the articles, they should look for an article that has the same overall theme as the theme of their annotated passage.

Teacher's Note

You can create a free account on Newsela to view/print full articles or for students to access via a device.

Display **slide 24**. Students then use the [Why-Lighting](#) strategy to annotate the article for the selected theme. As students highlight words, phrases, and sentences which represent their theme, they should identify why and how the highlighted parts demonstrate their selected theme. After reading/Why-Lighting, have students get into small groups of 3-4 based on the article they chose. Instruct the students to discuss the article, what they highlighted and why, and how the article is similar to the excerpt from *The Outsiders*.

- ["Give these athletes some strokes for supporting grieving migrant families"](#)
- ["Londoners recall night of terror after weekend attack leaves 7 dead"](#)
- ["Warriors feel they're 'just getting started' in winning NBA titles"](#)
- ["Pennsylvania lumber company makes a bold statement with Super Bowl ad"](#)
- ["Musk's plan: send 1 million people to Mars and start a new civilization"](#)

Additional Article

This Newsela article requires an account. If you have an account, you can print copies for your students. ["Opinion: Syrian kids need an education -- rich countries must pay for it"](#)

Evaluate

Display **slide 25**. In this modified [3-2-1](#) activity, students begin by selecting three theme statements (from their flower petals or newly created ones) that best summarize the theme of both their passage and their news article.

Then, students analyze the three theme statements and select the two statements which best summarize the passage and the article.

Finally, students synthesize the two theme statements into one theme statement which accurately summarizes the overall theme of both the passage and the article.

Example 3-2-1 Statement

3: "The strength of a family, like the strength of an army, lies in its loyalty to each other." - Mario Puzo / "Loyalty is what we seek in friendship." - Cicero / "You don't earn loyalty in a day. You earn it day-by-day." - Jeffrey Gitomer 2: Strength of a group of friends is determined by their loyalty to each other. / We build loyalty with each other each day. 1: Loyalty between friends is built each day and strengthens the group of friends.

Teacher's Note

To evaluate further, have students use text evidence from both the passage and the article to support the statements they selected and their final theme statement.

Resources

- Devlin, H. (2017, June 21). Musk's plan: send 1 million people to Mars and start a new civilization. The Guardian via Newsela (Ed. Newsela Staff. Version 1120). <https://newsela.com/read/elon-musk-life-on-mars/id/31999>
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). 3-2-1. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/117>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Always, Sometimes, Or Never True. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/145>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Four Corners. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/138>
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- Yousafzai, M., & Almellehan, M. (2017, March 12). Opinion: Syrian kids need an education -- rich countries must pay for it. Via Newsela (Ed. Newsela Staff. Version 1040). <https://newsela.com/read/malala-syria-children/id/27661/>