

Determining Theme

Theme: *Setting a New Course*

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Recognize broad messages in works of literature as themes.
- Identify how characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions point to a story's theme.
- Analyze how the changes and growth experienced by a character develop the theme.

THE LEARNING PROGRESSION

- **Grade 6:** NCSCS RL.6.2 requires students to determine a theme of a text and how it is conveyed through particular story details.
- **Grade 7:** NCSCS RL.7.2 builds on the Grade 6 standard by having students analyze how the theme develops over the course of the text.
- **Grade 8:** NCSCS RL.8.2 requires students to expand on this analysis by identifying the theme's relationship to the characters, setting, and plot.

PREREQUISITE SKILLS

- Recognize literary elements such as characters, setting, and plot.
- Make inferences based on story details.
- Explain how details about literary elements serve to develop the theme of a text.

TAP STUDENTS' PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

- Tell students they will be working on a lesson about theme. First, ask students what themes are. (*A theme is a message or lesson that an author wants to convey.*) Ask for examples of common themes. (*Stealing is wrong; Stand up for your beliefs; Hard work pays off.*)
- Explain that most stories have some kind of theme and that theme is an important element of fiction. Without some kind of theme, readers might have a hard time connecting a story to their own lives. When that happens, readers often lose interest.
- Point out that the story plot often reveals its theme. Discuss the main plot events in a familiar folk tale or myth. (*Sample response: King Midas wishes that everything he touches would turn to gold. His wish is granted, but he is no longer able to eat food or touch people.*) Ask students to use the main events to determine a theme; emphasize that there might be more than one theme. (*One theme from the story of King Midas is be careful what you wish for.*)
- Tell students that through theme, readers can identify with characters and situations in a story. By identifying a story's theme, they will be able to understand the message about life the author wants them to learn.

Ready Teacher Toolbox

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| | Prerequisite Skills | RL.7.2 |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------|
| Ready Lessons | ✓ | ✓ |
| Tools for Instruction | ✓ | ✓ |
| Interactive Tutorials | | ✓ |

NCSCS Focus

RL.7.2 Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text . . .

ADDITIONAL STANDARDS: RL.7.1, RL.7.3, RL.7.4, RL.7.7; L.7.1, L.7.4, L.7.5b; W.7.2, W.7.3, W.7.5; SL.7.1, SL.7.3, SL.7.4 (See page A35 for full text.)



AT A GLANCE

By studying a newspaper image and headline, students practice determining a theme, or a lesson about life.

STEP BY STEP

- Read the first paragraph and the definition of *theme*. Explain that careful readers are mindful of theme development, since it helps them understand story events and characters' motivations. Alternatively, the specific story details can help students make a broad generalization about a life lesson.
- Have students study the newspaper image and headline. Then have them circle the most important words in the headline.
- Explain to students that the chart helps them organize the details in the illustration that will help them determine its theme, or message.
- Read each event in the chart, and have students explain how these events relate to the words they circled. Discuss how students are able to formulate a story about the team based on the information in the headline. Then read the theme listed in the chart, and discuss how the words in the newspaper headline relate to it.
- Have students share a real-life story of a time when they learned a life lesson through an experience. Discuss how students might convey this theme through details if they wrote a story about the lesson they learned.

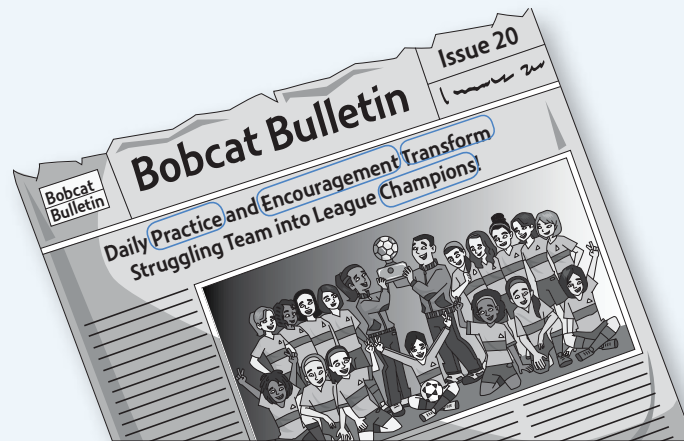
Determining Theme

NCSCS
RL.7.2: Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text...

Theme: *Setting a New Course*

Think back to your childhood. What life lesson did you learn from stories such as "Little Red Riding Hood" or "Snow White"? Here's a hint: They both have the same **theme**, or main message, which is "Good wins out over evil."

Study the image and headline below. Think about the theme they suggest.



Circle the most important words in the headline. Then read the chart below to see how organizing details can help you figure out the message of the illustration.

| | Events | Theme |
|--|---|---|
| Beginning of Season | The team struggles. | Hard work and the support of others leads to success. |
| End of Season | The team succeeds. | |
| Reason for Change from Beginning to End of Season | The coaches encouraged the team to practice more and work hard. | |

Just as a winning team develops over time, an author develops a theme over the course of the story. As you read, note clues such as how characters change or how story events develop to help you identify the theme, or lesson about life, that the author is trying to share.

Genre Focus

Literary Texts: Realistic Fiction

A realistic fiction story is a story with characters who take part in activities that could really happen. The characters, setting, and situations are believable and realistic, but the story is invented by the author.

- Realistic fiction stories usually take place in the present or recent past.
- The characters are the types of people who might exist in real life. For instance, they might act very much like students or adults who are alive today.
- The situations described are also realistic and believable. Characters deal with the same problems and issues that people might face in real life.

Based on these characteristics, have students share realistic fiction stories they have read. Familiar examples may include *Hatchet*, *Because of Winn-Dixie*, and *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

The three stories in this lesson are examples of realistic fiction. Both "A Different Day" and "The Substitute" include characters, settings, and events familiar to students. The excerpt from the novel *Little Women* describes a problem faced by a family during the Civil War era, but the characters and situation are realistic and the theme is timeless.



AT A GLANCE

Students read the beginning of a story about how a boy deals with a difficult situation and then identify the theme that is being developed.

STEP BY STEP

- Tell students that in this lesson they will now read a story about how a boy deals with a difficult situation.
- Read aloud the story “A Different Day.”
- Help students make connections to prior knowledge and experience by asking them to describe a time they witnessed someone standing up for him or herself. Discuss how that situation compares to Mick’s.
- Then read the question: “What theme is being developed in this part of the story?”
- Tell students you will use a Think Aloud to demonstrate a way of answering the question.

Think Aloud: This story is mostly about Mick, so I’m going to focus on details that describe his actions and feelings to see how these details begin to develop the theme of this part of the story. At the beginning, Mick watches Aaron demand lunch money from another student, Jake. Mick is relieved, though, because Aaron isn’t picking on him. Mick justifies his lack of action by reasoning that everyone picks on Jake.

- Direct students to the chart and ask where they’ve seen a similar chart before. Review that it helps them determine the story’s theme based on the events.
- Point out the important event at the beginning of the story in the first row of the chart, as well as Mick’s actions and feelings about what’s happening.

Think Aloud: In the middle of the story, which is the last paragraph on this page, Jake stands up to Aaron. Mick watches as Aaron jabs Jake in the chest, but Mick still doesn’t do anything.

- Have students record Mick’s words, actions, and feelings in the second row of the chart. (*Sample response: Mick watches Aaron jab Jake in the chest.*)

Think Aloud: Based on the events of the story and the character’s words, actions, and feelings, I can determine the theme being developed in this part of the story.

- Have students suggest a possible theme for this part of the story and complete the chart. (*Sample response: “It’s usually safer to avoid conflict.”*)



Read the first two paragraphs of a story about how a boy named Mick deals with a difficult situation.

Genre: Realistic Fiction

A Different Day by Rachel O’Meara

“Hand over your lunch money, kid!”

Mick stopped daydreaming and looked in the direction of the voice. In front of him was an all-too-familiar scene. Aaron was picking on Jake, just as he did every day at recess. But that was okay with Mick, because at least Aaron was not picking on him. It was also fine because everyone picked on Jake—that was just how things were around here, the accepted norm. In fact, every school Mick had ever attended had had a kid like Jake—someone who was an obvious target, easy to tease and bully.

Today was different, though, because Jake was standing tall, acting brave, and trying to stick up for himself. Aaron responded by getting nastier and louder as he hurled insults at Jake. He pushed forward, forcing Jake backwards and jabbing him in the chest. Jake looked terrified, and Mick could see that Jake’s lips were stretched thin as he tried not to let anyone see he was close to yelling for help—or worse, sobbing. But to Mick’s surprise, Jake still wasn’t backing down.

(continued)

Explore how to answer this question: “What theme is being developed in this part of the story?”

Mick’s feelings and observations about the other boys’ actions offer clues about the theme.

Find story details that tell how Mick thinks and feels, some of which are shown in the chart below. Add details from the text, and complete the chart.

| Point in Story | Important Events | Character’s Words, Actions, and Feelings | Theme |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Beginning | Aaron demands Jake’s lunch money. | Mick watches Aaron pick on Jake. Mick feels that the situation is okay because everyone picks on Jake. | See sample response. |
| Middle | Jake is standing up to Aaron. | See sample response. | |

Tier Two Vocabulary: Norm

- Direct students to the word *norm* on this page. Write the word *normal* on the board, and have students explain its meaning. Then have them suggest some examples of things they consider normal.
- Explain that *normal* is most often used as an adjective, and *norm* is the noun form. With this in mind, have students suggest meanings for the noun. (“something that is usual, typical, expected, or standard”) (**RL.7.4; L.7.4**)
- Encourage students to use the word *norm* in sentences that describe their classroom and school. Then have them use the word in a sentence to describe something that is out of the norm.

**AT A GLANCE**

Students continue reading the story about Mick. They answer a multiple-choice question and use clues from the story to determine a theme of the story.

STEP BY STEP

- Tell students they will continue reading the story about Mick watching a bully at school.
- The Close Reading helps students identify the point in the story at which Mick's feelings change and he moves into action. The Hint helps students recognize how one character's actions relate to the theme.
- Have students read the story and underline the sentence that describes when Mick takes action, as directed by the Close Reading.
- Ask volunteers to share the sentence they underlined. Discuss why they chose this sentence. If necessary, ask, "When does Mick move toward Aaron and Jake? What does Mick shout to Aaron?"
- Have students complete the page, and discuss their responses. Sample response to Show Your Thinking: The detail "he forced his feet toward the conflict" helped me choose this theme because it shows Mick decides to take a stand against the bully. Mick also calls attention to himself by shouting at Aaron, taking the pressure off Jake.

ANSWER ANALYSIS

Choice A is incorrect. There is no evidence that Mick had been bullied, but he still knew bullying was wrong.

Choice B is incorrect. It does not take into account what happens in the second part of the story.

Choice C is correct. Mick arrives at the decision to stand up to bullies at the end of the story.

Choice D is incorrect. It may be true that bullying will always be a problem, but this idea is not supported by details in the text. Instead, it supports why teenagers can connect to this story.

ERROR ALERT: Students who did not choose C might have confused the theme at the beginning of the story with the theme of the entire story. Have students review Mick's thoughts and feelings throughout the entire story.



Continue reading the story. Use the Close Reading and the Hint to help you answer the question.

Close Reading

In the first part of the story, Mick only watches Aaron's interactions with Jake. In the second part of the story, Mick's feelings change.

Underline the sentence that describes when Mick takes action.

(continued from page 62)

As he watched from a few feet away, Mick slowly began to fill with anger toward Aaron and compassion for Jake. What was happening wasn't right, and somebody ought to do something. But, on the other hand, Aaron was a nasty character. And when dealing with someone like that, it might be best to lie low and not interfere.

"Hand it over! Now!" insisted Aaron impatiently.

Aaron faked a swipe at Jake, and then laughed loudly when Jake jumped back and cringed. The laughter was even crueler and more hurtful than the words. Today is different, thought Mick, and he forced his feet toward the conflict.

"Not today, Aaron," shouted Mick. "Leave Jake alone!"

Hint

Think about how Mick changes over the course of the story. Which choice best sums up the lesson you learn about life?

Circle the correct answer.

Which statement best states a theme of the story?

- A** Only someone who has been bullied can understand bullying.
- B** It's best to stay out of trouble and never get involved.
- C** It's important to take a stand against bullies.
- D** Bullying will always be a problem that affects many teenagers.

**Show Your Thinking**

Look at the answer you chose above. Tell which details in the story led you to choose that sentence as the theme.

Responses will vary.



With a partner, take turns summarizing the story. Then discuss which story events have the strongest impact on the story's theme.

L7: Determining Theme

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63

ELL Support: Regular Past-Tense Verbs

- Explain to students that verbs are action words. The past tense of a verb tells that the action has already happened in the past. The past tense of a regular verb ends in *-ed*.
- Direct students to the words *watched* and *insisted* in the story. Write the words on the board. Work with students to identify the present tense of each verb. (*watch, insist*) Tell students these are both regular verbs since the past tense of each ends in *-ed*.
- Have students find other regular past-tense verbs in this story. (*forced, shouted*) **(L.7.1)**

**AT A GLANCE**

Students read a story about a substitute teacher. After the first reading, you will ask three questions to check your students' comprehension of the story.

STEP BY STEP

- Have students read the story silently without referring to the Study Buddy or Close Reading text.
- Help students make connections to prior knowledge and experience by asking them to think about their favorite substitute teachers. Before asking students to answer questions about the text, invite a few volunteers to share what made these substitute teachers special.
- Ask the following questions to ensure students' comprehension of the text:

Why are the students in Laila's class talking loudly and laughing? (*They are taking advantage of a substitute teacher by not behaving well.*)

How does Laila know Mr. Marrero, the substitute teacher? (*Laila and Mr. Marrero are neighbors.*)

How does Laila get the class to quiet down and pay attention to Mr. Marrero? (*Laila flicks the lights, like Ms. Vasquez, and then asks him to tell the story of when he was on a jet that crash-landed in the ocean. The students are immediately interested in the story and quiet down so they can listen.*)

- Ask students to reread first paragraph and look at the Study Buddy think aloud. What does the Study Buddy help them think about?

Tip: The Study Buddy guides students to look for clues about the main character. Explain that understanding his or her thoughts and feelings may help students understand the story's theme. Point out that the lesson the main character learns is often similar to the lesson the author wants readers to learn.

- Have students read the rest of the story. Tell them to follow the directions in the Close Reading.

Tip: In both this and the previous story, the theme is evident in the ways that the main character changes throughout the story. Remind students to pay attention to character development, as it often has a significant impact on the story as a whole.

- Finally, have students answer the questions on page 65. When they have finished, use the Answer Analysis to discuss correct and incorrect responses.



Read the story. Use the Study Buddy and the Close Reading to guide your reading.



The author includes details to help me understand what kind of person Laila is. I'm going to underline clues that tell me something about her.

Close Reading

Laila has mixed emotions about the situation.

Underline the sentence that explains why she feels the way she does.

How does Laila change at the end of the story?

Circle the sentences that describe when Laila makes a decision to act differently.

Genre: Realistic Fiction

The Substitute by Bailey Sebastian

- 1 When Laila walked into math class on Thursday, the room was in an uproar. Although the students usually took their seats immediately and opened their books quietly, today they were gathered in groups, chatting loudly, and laughing.
- 2 Laila stopped just inside the doorway, but then quickly spotted the reason for the change. Instead of Ms. Vasquez, a rather short, older gentleman with glasses perched crookedly on his nose stood at the front of the class. Laila did a double-take—the man was her neighbor, Mr. Marrero! She and her family had gone to pay their respects after his wife had passed away last year, and she remembered him telling an amazing story about surviving an emergency landing during a transcontinental flight.
- 3 “Hey, Laila, wasn't *Teen Idol* awesome last night?” yelled Jason.
- 4 “Y-yeah,” stammered Laila. Jason didn't usually talk to Laila. The popular kids just wrote her off as “that quiet girl.”
- 5 Laila bit her lip; she wanted to keep talking, but she felt bad for Mr. Marrero, and she was embarrassed by her class's behavior. Without realizing it, Laila reached over and flicked the light switch, just like Ms. Vasquez did when the class was unruly.
- 6 Suddenly silent, every classmate turned to stare at her, and Laila's cheeks burned bright red. But then she smiled at the substitute and said, “Hello, Mr. Marrero—”
- 7 Mr. Marrero focused, and then recognition dawned and he responded, “Oh, my neighbor . . . Laila, right?”
- 8 Laila heard someone snicker and knew it was time to blend back in or help Mr. Marrero. She took a deep breath. “Mr. Marrero, will you tell us about the time you were on a jet that crash-landed in the ocean?”
- 9 Thirty mouths gaped open, and sixty eyes looked with curiosity at Mr. Marrero, soon to be their new favorite substitute.

Tier Two Vocabulary: Unruly

- Direct students to the word *unruly* in paragraph 5. Ask students to explain what the prefix *un-* means (“not”) and have them identify the base word (*ruly*). Explain that *ruly* means “neat and tidy” or “obedient; following the rules.” Based on these word parts and the context, have students define *unruly* as it is used in this story. (“*disorderly, disruptive*”)
- Have students describe things that are or can be unruly. Challenge students to think of synonyms for *unruly*. (*disruptive, disorderly, disobedient, rowdy*) (**RL.7.4; L.7.4**)

**STEP BY STEP**

- Have students read questions 1–3, using the Hints to help them answer those questions.

Tip: Question 3 requires students to find details to support their answer to question 2. Remind students to look for details at the beginning, middle, and end of the story.

- Discuss with students the Answer Analysis below.

ANSWER ANALYSIS

- The correct choice is A. Laila is “embarrassed by her class’s behavior” since they are all talking and not paying attention. The story also mentions that the popular students call her “that quiet girl.” Choice B is incorrect. The story doesn’t mention Laila talking with her friends before class. Choice C is incorrect. Laila’s cheeks turn red when she flicks the light on and off, showing she doesn’t like to be the center of attention. Choice D is incorrect. There is no evidence that Laila dislikes the popular kids.
- The correct choice is A. Laila is nervous about helping Mr. Marrero, but she shows courage by quieting the kids and asking him to tell a story. Choice B, C, and D are incorrect because they aren’t themes demonstrated by this story.
- The correct choices are 6 and 7. These phrases show Laila realizing she needs courage and then mustering it to show Mr. Marrero kindness. Choices 1 and 8 are incorrect. These phrases show some support for choice D of item 2, but Mr. Marrero tells a story of adventure, not of wisdom. Choices 2 and 5 are incorrect. These phrases show some support for choice B of item 2, but popularity versus kindness is not the theme developed in the story. Choices 3 and 4 are incorrect. These phrases support choice C of item 2, but quiet versus shy is not the theme developed in this story.

RETEACHING

For question 2, draw the chart below. Help students fill in the boxes. Sample responses are given.

| Important Events | Words, Actions, and Feelings | Theme |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Laila’s class is misbehaving. | Laila is uncomfortable. | Taking action requires courage. |

**Hints**

To help me answer the first question, I’m going to look back at the text I underlined in the story.

Only one claim is directly supported by details from the story.

Choose the details that best support the theme of the story.

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

- Which statement best describes Laila at the beginning of the story?
 - Laila is a quiet student who appreciates an orderly classroom.
 - Laila enjoys chatting with her friends before class.
 - Laila likes to be the focus of attention in all of her classes.
 - Laila dislikes the popular kids who ignore her.
- Which sentence best states an important theme about human behavior as described in “The Substitute”?
 - Choosing to take action requires courage.
 - Older people often have wisdom to share.
 - A quiet person isn’t necessarily a shy person.
 - Being popular isn’t as important as being kind.
- Select **two** pieces of evidence from “The Substitute” that support your answer to question 2.
 - “him telling an amazing story about surviving an emergency landing”
 - “The popular kids just wrote her off”
 - “that quiet girl”
 - “she wanted to keep talking, but she felt bad for Mr. Marrero”
 - “every classmate turned to stare at her”
 - “knew it was time to blend back in or help”
 - “she took a deep breath”
 - “tell us about a time when you were on a jet that crash-landed in the ocean”

Integrating Standards

Use these questions to further students’ understanding of “The Substitute.”

- How does Laila’s class normally behave with Ms. Vasquez? How do you know? (**RL.7.1**)

The class normally behaves well for Ms. Vasquez because the story says, “the students usually took their seats immediately and opened their books quietly.”

- What is the meaning of *double-take*, and why is it used in Paragraph 2? (**RL.7.4; L.7.4**)

A double-take is a delayed reaction to something unexpected. It shows surprise. When someone quickly looks at something twice in disbelief, he or she does a double-take. Laila does a double-take when she sees the substitute teacher. She is surprised to see that he is her neighbor. This is an unexpected turn of events.



Read the story. Then answer the questions that follow.

from *Little Women*

by Louisa May Alcott

While their father is serving in the Civil War, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy help their mother, Marmee, carry on with their daily lives. The family makes do with what little money they have. Then a telegram arrives. Father is ill, and Marmee needs to go to Washington.

- 1 How still the room was as they listened breathlessly and how suddenly the whole world seemed to change, as the girls gathered about their mother, feeling as if all the happiness and support of their lives was about to be taken from them.
 - 2 Mrs. March read the message over, and stretched out her arms to her daughters, saying, in a tone they never forgot, "I shall go at once, but it may be too late. Oh, children, children, help me to bear it!"
 - 3 For several minutes there was nothing but the sound of sobbing in the room, mingled with broken words of comfort, tender assurances of help, and hopeful whispers that died away in tears. Poor Hannah, their servant, was the first to recover, and with unconscious wisdom she set all the rest a good example . . .
 - 4 "I won't waste no time a-cryin', but git your things ready right away, mum," she said heartily, as she wiped her face on her apron . . .
 - 5 "She's right, there's no time for tears now. Be calm, girls, and let me think."
 - 6 They tried to be calm, poor things, as their mother sat up, looking pale but steady, and put away her grief to think and plan for them.
 - 7 "Where's Laurie?" she asked presently, when she had collected her thoughts and decided on the first duties to be done.
 - 8 "Here, ma'am. Oh, let me do something!" cried the neighbor boy, hurrying from the next room . . .
 - 9 "Send a telegram saying I will come at once. The next train goes early in the morning. I'll take that."
 - 10 "What else? The horses are ready. I can go anywhere, do anything," he said, looking ready to fly to the ends of the earth.
 - 11 "Leave a note at Aunt March's. Jo, give me that pen and paper."
 - 12 Jo drew the table before her mother, well knowing that money for the long, sad journey must be borrowed, and feeling as if she could do anything to add a little to the sum for her father.
 - 13 "Jo, run to the rooms, and tell Mrs. King that I can't come. On the way get these things . . . I must go prepared for nursing. Hospital stores are not always good . . . Father shall have the best of everything. Amy, tell Hannah to get down the black trunk, and Meg, come and help me find my things, for I'm half bewildered."
- The family rush off to help Marmee prepare. Beth runs to ask their neighbor, Mr. Laurence, for help. To the relief of the girls, he also makes plans to have his grandson's tutor escort Marmee to Washington.



- 14 Everything was arranged by the time Laurie returned with a note from Aunt March, enclosing the desired sum, and a few lines repeating . . . that she had always told them it was absurd for March to go into the army, always predicted that no good would come of it, and she hoped they would take her advice the next time. Mrs. March put the note in the fire, the money in her purse, and went on with her preparations . . .
- 15 Jo came walking in with a very queer expression of countenance, for there was a mixture of fun and fear, satisfaction and regret in it, which puzzled the family as much as did the roll of bills she laid before her mother, saying with a little choke in her voice, "That's my contribution toward making Father comfortable and bringing him home!"
- 16 "My dear, where did you get it? Twenty-five dollars! Jo, I hope you haven't done anything rash?"
- 17 "No, it's mine honestly. I didn't beg, borrow, or steal it. I earned it, and I don't think you'll blame me, for I only sold what was my own."
- 18 As she spoke, Jo took off her bonnet, and a general outcry arose, for all her abundant hair was cut short.
- 19 "Your hair! Your beautiful hair!" "Oh, Jo, how could you? Your one beauty." "My dear girl, there was no need of this." "She doesn't look like my Jo any more, but I love her dearly for it!"
- 20 As everyone exclaimed, and Beth hugged the cropped head tenderly, Jo assumed an indifferent air, which did not deceive anyone a particle, and said, rumpling up the brown bush and trying to look as if she liked it, "It doesn't affect the fate of the nation, so don't wail, Beth. It will be good for my vanity, I was getting too proud of my wig. It will do my brains good to have that mop taken off. My head feels deliciously light and cool, and the barber said I could soon have a curly crop, which will be boyish, becoming, and easy to keep in order. I'm satisfied, so please take the money and let's have supper."

Answer the questions.

- 1 What is an important theme of the story?
 - A Vanity and selfishness are stronger than generosity and kindness.
 - B In times of trouble, family and good friends support each other.
 - C Misfortune can overwhelm even the strongest people.
 - D The best way to deal with grief is to distract yourself with other tasks.

AT A GLANCE

Students independently read a longer story and answer questions in a format that provides test practice.

STEP BY STEP

- Tell students to use what they have learned about reading closely and determining theme to read the story on pages 66 and 67.
- Remind students to underline or circle important details.
- Tell students to answer the questions on pages 67 and 68.
- When students have finished, use the Answer Analysis to discuss correct responses and the reasons for them.

ANSWER ANALYSIS

- 1 Choice B is correct. During a critical time for her family, Jo sold her hair and earned a large sum of money, which she selflessly gave to help her father. This supports the theme that family and friends help one another during times of trouble. Choice A is the opposite of the actual theme. Characters' actions in this story show selflessness, not selfishness. Choice C is not the best answer since the characters seem worried about their father's well-being, but they are not overwhelmed by it. They find a way to solve the problem. Choice D is incorrect since none of the characters distract themselves with other tasks. **(DOK 2)**

Theme Connection

- How do all the passages in this lesson relate to the theme of setting a new course?
- Which theme from the lesson passages seems to be the most relevant to real-life situations? Explain.



- 2 Choice C is correct. Aunt March’s note says “she had always told them it was absurd for March to go into the army,” but she still sent along money to help. Choice A is not the best choice since, even though Aunt March reminds everyone she was right, she doesn’t express the need to prove it. Also, it does not support the theme of the story. Choice B is incorrect. Aunt March doesn’t indicate she feels obligated to give the money. Choice D is incorrect since Aunt March does not apologize. **(DOK 2)**
- 3 Choice D is correct. Jo’s line supports the theme since no one asked her to sell her hair, yet she did it anyway and didn’t want to make a big fuss about it. Choices A, B, and C do not support the story’s theme since they are not about the family supporting one another during times of trouble. **(DOK 2)**
- 4 Sample response: The family and neighbors all work together to help Marmee when they hear the news about Father. The daughters help their mother prepare for the trip. Aunt March sends money. A neighbor sends someone to escort Marmee to Washington. Jo sells her hair to raise money. All these actions show how the family helps one another to make it through a difficult time. **(DOK 3)**

Part 5: Independent Practice
Lesson 7

- 2 How does Aunt March’s response to Marmee’s note help to develop the theme?
 - A Despite the situation, Aunt March still wants to prove she was right.
 - B Aunt March gives only the amount of money she feels she is obligated to give.
 - C Even though she expressed her disapproval, Aunt March is still willing to help.
 - D Aunt March realizes that her early warnings were inappropriate and apologizes.

- 3 Which quote from the story **best** supports the story’s theme?
 - A “I won’t waste no time a-cryin’, but git your things ready right away, mum.”
 - B “I earned it, and I don’t think you’ll blame me, for I only sold what was my own.”
 - C “She’s right, there’s no time for tears now. Be calm, girls, and let me think.”
 - D “That’s my contribution toward making Father comfortable and bringing him home.”

- 4 Describe how the author uses the characters’ actions to develop the theme over the course of this story. Cite at least **two** details from the text to support your response.

[See sample response.](#)

Self Check

Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 44.

68 L7: Determining Theme
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Integrating Standards

Use these questions and tasks as opportunities to interact with the excerpt from *Little Women*.

- 1 What details from the story help you infer Marmee’s feelings? **(RL.7.1)**
After Marmee reads the message about Father, she says, “Oh, children, children, help me to bear it!” Then there is much sobbing. Marmee is also described as “pale” as she has to “put away her grief.” From these details, I can infer that Marmee is worried, scared, and needs the support of her family, but she is also willing and able to set aside her feelings in order to go to her husband and nurse him.
- 2 How does the setting of this story affect the characters and plot? **(RL.7.3)**
This story is set during the Civil War era, and Father has become ill near the fighting. Having little money to spare, the family finds it hard to address the problems of traveling and nursing him properly, which was necessary in those days when hospital care was far less advanced.

- 3 Why are the words in Hannah’s dialogue spelled differently? Why does the author do this? **(RL.7.4)**
Hannah’s lines are written as they are pronounced. The author does this to show how Hannah speaks and to differentiate her from the other characters. This detail helps develop the characters and show the time period.
- 4 Suppose you are Jo. Write a diary entry for the day described in this story. What are your thoughts? How do you feel about the day’s events? **(W.7.3)**
Diary entries will vary. Encourage students to use details from the story dialogue in their entries.
- 5 Discuss in small groups: What do you learn about daily life during the Civil War era, based on story details? Cite evidence from the text. **(SL.7.1)**
Discussions will vary. Have students think about why the time period is significant in this story and how it is conveyed through specific details. Remind students to follow discussion rules.

Writing Activities

Write an Informative Essay (W.7.2)

- Have students review the themes of the stories in this lesson. Ask students to identify ways in which these themes were evident in the stories themselves. What details did the authors use to support the themes?
- Ask students to choose one of the themes from this lesson and write an informative essay about this theme. How is it conveyed through the text? Why is this theme important for people to read about?
- Encourage students to share their essays with the class.

Denotations and Connotations (L.7.5b)

- Review the definitions of and distinctions between the denotation and connotation of a word. (*Its denotation is its literal meaning, while its connotation is an idea and emotion associated with it.*)
- Direct students to “A Different Day” on student book page 63. Point out various words, such as *cringed*, *crueler*, and *hurtful*. Have students discuss or look up the meaning of each.
- Have students reread the story to determine the word connotations. How do the connotations differ from the denotations? Then discuss other words in the stories with strong connotations.

LISTENING ACTIVITY (SL.7.3, SL.7.4)

Listen Closely/Delineate a Speaker’s Claims

- Have small groups of students reread one of the stories from this lesson. Then have them describe its theme and point out details in the story that support their responses.
- Have students listen closely to each group’s claims and the supporting evidence. Students should evaluate the soundness of the group’s reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY (SL.7.1)

Talk in a Group/Compare Stories

- Ask students to compare and contrast two or more of this lesson’s stories.
- Have students form small groups to compare and contrast aspects of realistic fiction that the authors chose to include in each story. What elements of each story make it part of the realistic fiction genre? Which story is the most realistic? Which is the least realistic? Why?
- Appoint one member of each group to take notes. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for discussion, and then have each group share its results with the class.

MEDIA ACTIVITY (RL.7.7)

Be Creative/Watch a Film Version of a Story

- Direct students to one (or more) of the many film versions of *Little Women*. Have students watch the scene represented in this lesson’s final story.
- Students should compare and contrast the different versions. How does the visual presentation in the movie contribute to their understanding? How does it differ from what they “see” and “hear” in their minds’ eye as they read?

RESEARCH ACTIVITY (W.7.5; SL.7.4)

Research and Present/Give a Presentation

- Ask students to research what life was like for many families during the Civil War. Are the experiences of the March family in *Little Women* typical? Why or why not?
- Have students present their findings to the class. Remind them to use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
- Encourage students to include a multimedia component in their presentations, if possible. They should use these components to clarify their findings and emphasize important points.