

Identifying Big Ideas and Themes

Academic Support Resources for the Common Core State Standards

Early in their academic experiences, students are asked to compare and contrast the themes of stories. The importance of identifying themes is reflected in the Common Core State Standards (see CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.9). Later, they are asked to determine a theme and detail its development, analyze how an author develops a theme, or consider how an author treats a theme in order to transform source material. To satisfy the requirements of these kinds of assignments, students must understand what a theme is, become familiar with common themes, and devise ways to identify the theme of a particular story.



When you are ready to review or relay for the first time how to identify big ideas or themes, display the following page and discuss the information. Print out a copy and encourage students to refer to this reference.

Grammar Gallery users ...

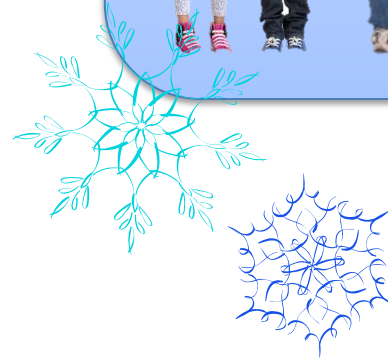
[Click here](#) to go to the Reading Gallery and have students practice identifying the themes of stories.

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from the
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Identifying Big Ideas or Themes

Teachers often use the phrase *big idea* as a synonym for *theme*. In order to identify the big idea or theme of a story, here is what you need to know:

What is a big idea or theme?

A big idea or theme is the message, moral, or lesson the author wants you to learn from reading the story.

What are some common themes?

courage	cowardice	peace	war
fear	hope	envy	perseverance
patience	love	faith	sorrow
kindness	equality	joy	humility
obedience	purity	trust	acceptance

Is there a way to identify a theme?

Yes, ask yourself the following questions:

- What did the characters learn?
- Did the characters grow or change? If so, in what way?
- If the characters didn't grow or change, why not?

Can a story have more than one theme?

Yes, stories often have more than one theme.

Is there a right answer to the question, "What is the theme of this story?"

Usually, no. Different readers may identify different themes. This is the best way to answer the question, "What is the theme of this story?"

I think the theme of this story is _____ because _____. In the text, for example, _____.

For example:

I think the theme of the story is love because the family's love for one another motivates each of them to make personal sacrifices. In the text, for example, the mother sells her favorite bracelet so her daughter can buy a new dress.