

Theme in Literature

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. A **theme** is the big idea in a story. It's the message about people or the world that the author is trying to get across. Themes are **universal**, which means they are true in all times and all places. They apply to many different types of people.

Read the following passage from a story.

Rohan triumphantly lifted the trophy above his head. Despite all the obstacles, he had won. Beneath his cheerful exterior, he felt a twinge of the constant pain he'd learned to live with. Almost unconsciously, Rohan removed one hand from the trophy and rubbed the thin red scar that snaked around his ankle. He thought back to the surgery and the weeks spent lying in his bed, unable to compete. The months of exercises to strengthen his leg. "Rohan!" he heard the crowd scream, as if in slow motion. A smile broke across Rohan's face, shattering his thoughts. He returned his hand to his trophy, firmly grasping it.

Which of the following is most likely a theme of the story?

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| A. Some goals are too hard to achieve even if you try many times. | B. Through determination, you can overcome big challenges. |
| C. You need the support of your family to overcome challenges. | D. When you achieve a goal, you shouldn't brag about it. |
2. Themes are about universal topics. For example, a topic could be compassion, relationships or fate. A theme is often stated as a judgment about one of these topics. For example, a theme about the topic of relationships could be "relationships teach you important lessons."

Which of the following could be the theme of a story?

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| A. You can never turn your back on your family. | B. A young girl returns to her family after moving far away. |
| C. Most people have at least one brother or sister. | D. "I'll never speak to you again," she said quietly to her mother. |

3. Stories that come from different parts of the world, cultures or time periods can have the same theme.

Read the following passage from a story.

Eriene gazed across the field, noticing how peaceful Creature's Cove seemed now. The only evidence of the battle were the scorched patches of earth dotting the landscape like a sunburn. Eriene clasped the jade pendant that dangled heavily under her robe. Her great-aunt's words echoed in her head. "This necklace has always belonged to the protector of what is good and just in the kingdom. Now, it belongs to you."

Eriene had passed her first test, the dragon no longer a threat to the kingdom's way of life. Wisps of smoke drifted up from the land that its poisonous breath had burned. Soon, new grass would poke through, and memories of the battle would recede into the past. But Eriene knew this was not the end. This dragon lay slain in the Yonderland. But its spirit would return again and again in different forms.

Which of the following is most likely a theme of the story?

- A. Evil can easily be defeated. B. Good people are difficult to find.
- C. Good and evil always exist together in the world. D. People often forget the things they don't want to remember.
4. The **main idea** is what the story is mostly about, or a quick summary of what happened. In contrast, the theme is the author's larger message that he or she wants the reader to take away.

Read the following passage.

The last time George saw Charity, they were eight years old, building forts of dirt and sticks in the corner lot. When Charity's family moved to Texas, George was heartbroken. There were 500 miles between them, but to George, she may as well have moved to the moon. For a time, George mourned the loss of their friendship. But much to his surprise, a letter appeared in his mailbox the next week. It was the first of many sharp, funny letters in which Charity's unique personality leaped off the page. Through this correspondence, George followed six years of events in Charity's life: her family's many moves, her struggles in school, her triumphs playing the violin. He hoped that she looked forward to his responses as much as he looked forward to hers.

What is the main idea of the passage?

- A. People can remain good friends even if they are separated. B. A boy remains friends with a girl who's far away by writing letters.
- C. As people grow up and go through hard times, they lose their innocence. D. A boy's relationship with a good friend ends after she moves away.

5. In most stories, you have to analyze the characters' traits and the events of the plot to infer the theme. **Characters** are the people, animals or creatures in stories. The **plot** is the sequence of events in the story.

Read the following passage from a story.

Marta was stumped. She had turned the details of the case over and over in her head, trying to figure out the answer. The suspect had somehow entered the store, stolen the artwork and exited without leaving any trace or fingerprints. Marta paced, her movements matching her storm of thoughts. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed the new technological device she had been given to use, which she'd been avoiding like the plague. "I wonder..." she thought.

Hesitantly, Marta typed the details of the case into the device's keyboard. It whirred and spat out a list of similar cases and how they'd been solved. Reading through the information, Marta was amazed. She had been pondering for hours, but 30 seconds with this device, and she could find answer! With new respect, she rushed off.

Which detail from the passage provides the best clue that a theme of the story is "technology can have good effects"?

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| A. "The suspect had somehow entered the store, stolen the artwork and exited without any trace or fingerprints." | B. "Marta paced, her movements matching her storm of thoughts." |
| C. "Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed the new technological device she had been given to use, which she'd been avoiding like the plague." | D. "She had been pondering for hours, but 30 seconds with this device, and she could find her answer!" |

6. You and your friend might analyze the plot and the characters of a story and come up with two different correct themes.

Read the following passage from a story.

Wind whipped at Vanessa, Mo and Jaime's faces as they trudged up the mountain. "Do you have the ice samples?" Vanessa questioned Mo again.

"Why don't you carry them the rest of the way?" he responded irritably. Mo was digging into his backpack to retrieve the samples when suddenly, a gust of wind snatched them out of his hands, sending them tumbling down the mountain.

"If we lose those, this was all for nothing!" Vanessa cried. The wind roared angrily, churning flakes of snow that had newly begun to fall. How far had the samples gone? The three scientists stared at each other in horrified silence.

"I'll go back for them," Jaime spoke up quietly.

Vanessa and Mo looked at Jaime. He was the smallest and youngest of the group, barely strong enough to carry his large backpack.

"I'll go," he said louder.

Which sentence from the passage provides the best clue that a theme of the story is "Courage can be found in the people you least expect it"?

- A. "Why don't you carry them the rest of the way?" he responded irritably.
- B. "How far had the samples gone?"
- C. "The wind roared angrily, churning flakes of snow that had newly begun to fall."
- D. "He was the smallest and youngest of the group, barely strong enough to carry his large backpack."