

Lesson 9

Determining the Theme of a Story



Learning Target

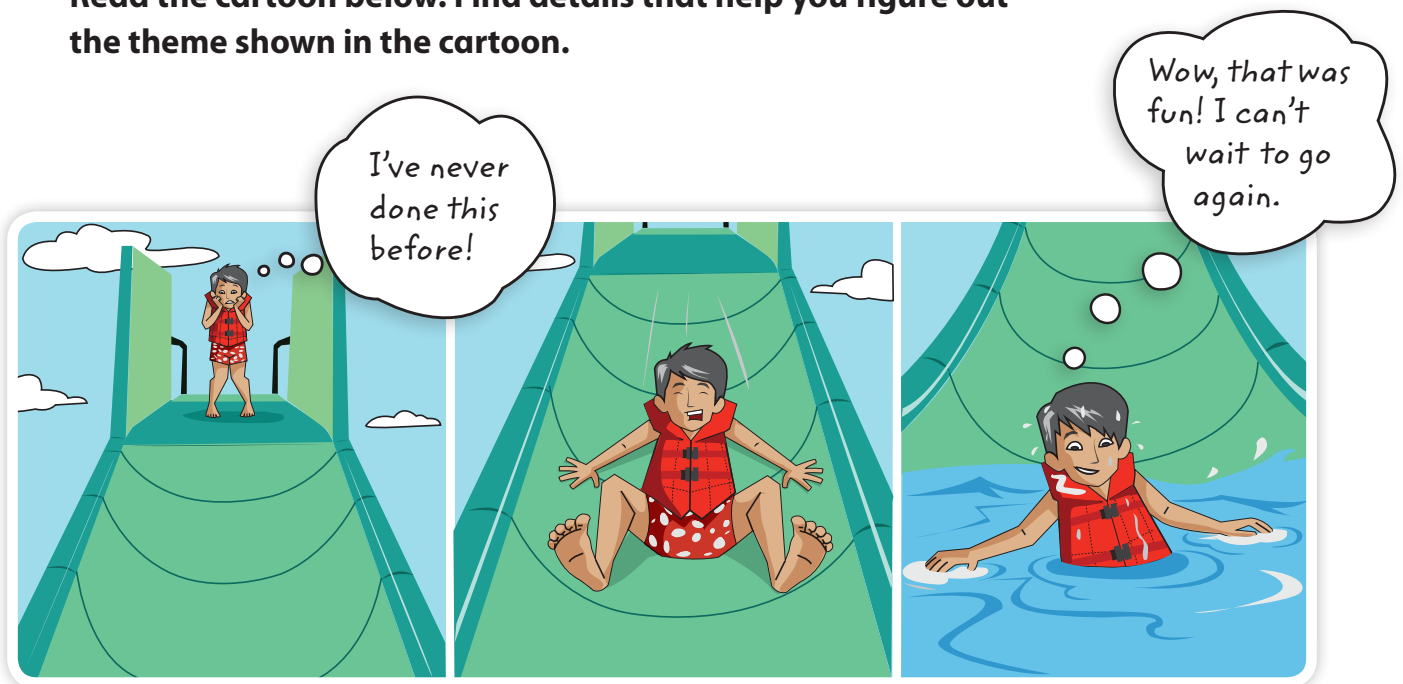


Using details in the text to identify the theme of a story will help you understand the story's important message, or lesson.

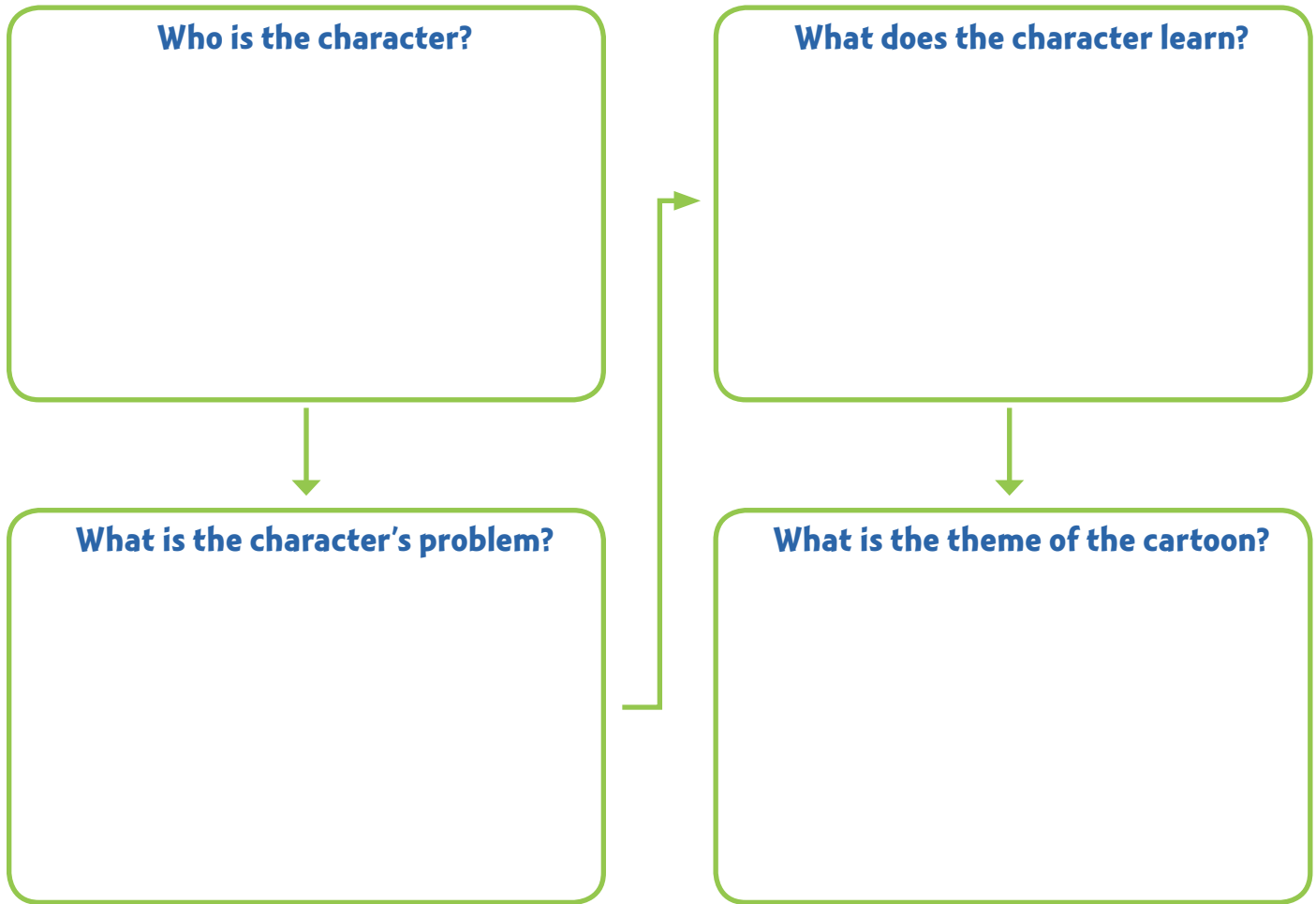
- ▶ **Read** Most story authors want to share an important message or lesson about people or life called the **theme**. Normally, authors do not state the theme directly. Instead, they expect their readers to **infer** the theme from what happens in the story.

To figure out the theme of a story, look for details that show what the characters do, say, think, and feel. Think about how the characters solve their problems and what can be learned from their experiences.

Read the cartoon below. Find details that help you figure out the theme shown in the cartoon.



► **Think** What have you learned about how details help to develop the theme of a story? Think about the important details you identified in the cartoon. Complete the *Theme Chart* to identify the theme of the cartoon.



► **Talk** Share your chart with a partner.

- Which details about the character did you include?
- How did each of you describe what the boy learned?
- Did you agree about the theme of the cartoon?



Academic Talk

Use these words to talk about the text.

- **theme**
- **infer**

The Two Travelers

adapted from a fable by Aesop

1 Two men planned a trip that would take them through wild, lonely country. They promised that if they met with danger they would stand by each other.

2 “To the end!” said the first man.

3 “To the end!” said the second man.

4 They traveled only a short distance when a bear rushed out of the woods at them. The first man, as soon as he saw the bear, rushed to a tree and climbed it as quickly as he could. The other man, who was slower to see the bear, realized he had no time to escape. He fell to the ground, pretending to be dead.

5 The bear came over to the man on the ground. The animal sniffed and smelled the traveler. The bear put his face right up to the man’s ear. But the man held his breath and soon, losing interest, the bear walked away.

6 When the bear was safely out of sight, the first traveler slid down the tree and walked over to his companion, who was now sitting by the side of the road.

7 “Well, that was a close one, wasn’t it?” the first man said. “What did that bear say when he had his mouth to your ear?”

8 “It’s no secret,” growled the second man. “He said I should never again believe anything said by a coward like you!”



Close Reader Habits

Underline words and phrases that tell you about the thoughts and feelings the second man has about the story events.

Explore

How do the details about the story characters and events help to develop the theme in “The Two Travelers”?



What happens in the story? How do characters act and feel? These questions will help you figure out the theme.

Think

1 What do the characters promise each other as the story opens?

What happens that creates a problem for the characters?

2 How does each character attempt to solve the problem?

First Man: _____

Second Man: _____

3 At the end of the story, what has the second man learned about the first man’s promises?

Talk

4 Discuss story details that develop the theme of “The Two Travelers.” How do the story events, especially the ending, help to reveal the author’s lesson about life?

Write

5 Short Response Describe a theme of “The Two Travelers.” Include details about the story events and characters’ actions that helped you infer the theme, or the author’s life lesson. Use the space provided on page 140 to write your response.

HINT Focus on what the characters do and what they say.



Claudine's Tack Attack

by Nadine Blanc

1 For three long years, the Nazis had occupied France. By now, everyone in my village was used to German trucks driving through, carrying ammunition and supplies to the front to supply Nazi soldiers in their battles against the American troops. From her window, my friend Claudine and I watched glumly as the trucks roared and rumbled by.

2 “Too bad we can’t slow them down,” I remarked one day.

3 Claudine’s eyes became thoughtful. “Maybe we can!” She shared her idea, and we ran to her father’s workshop.

4 “These might work,” she announced, holding out a can of short, extremely sharp, steel tacks. “Papa uses them to shingle roofs.”

5 Heading back to the road, I had second thoughts. How could two eleven-year-olds slow down a war machine with a bunch of tacks? Still, I followed Claudine up the hill to a spot above the road and crouched behind an old stone wall.

6 All too soon we heard the rumble of engines, so we raced to the road. “Like this,” whispered Claudine. She began flinging handfuls of tacks onto the pavement, so I threw handfuls, too. Then, just in time, we ducked out of sight. Blam! The exploding tire sounded like a gunshot. Then another. Blam!

7 “Two blowouts!” Claudine whispered as we crept away. After dark, we crept back toward the road. The German soldiers were still struggling with the heavy rubber tires. Better yet, the road was so narrow that the other trucks could not pass. Claudine and I had delayed twelve trucks for half the day!



Close Reader Habits

How do the girls’ actions relate to the theme? Reread the story.

Underline details that explain what happens as a result of the girls’ actions.



Historical fiction is set in the past. Some parts are based on historical fact. Other parts have been made up by the author.

Think Use what you learned from reading the story to respond to the following questions.

- 1 Which statement **best** explains why the girls wanted to slow down the German trucks?
 - A The girls did not want the Nazi trucks to take French supplies back to Germany.
 - B The girls wanted to make trouble for the German troops who were occupying France.
 - C The girls wanted to help the Americans troops steal German supplies that were being carried on the trucks.
 - D The girls wanted to slow down trucks delivering supplies to soldiers who were fighting American troops.

- 2 Which statement **best** describes how events in paragraphs 5, 6, and 7 are important to the theme of the story?
 - A They show that the girls grew tired of looking out a window.
 - B They show that the girls passed up a chance to be brave.
 - C They show that the girls' dangerous risk paid off.
 - D They show that the girls' clever plan was only temporary.

Talk

- 3 Discuss the theme of the story. Identify important details about events and the girls' motivations and behavior that help reveal the theme. Organize the information in the Theme Chart provided on page 141.

Write

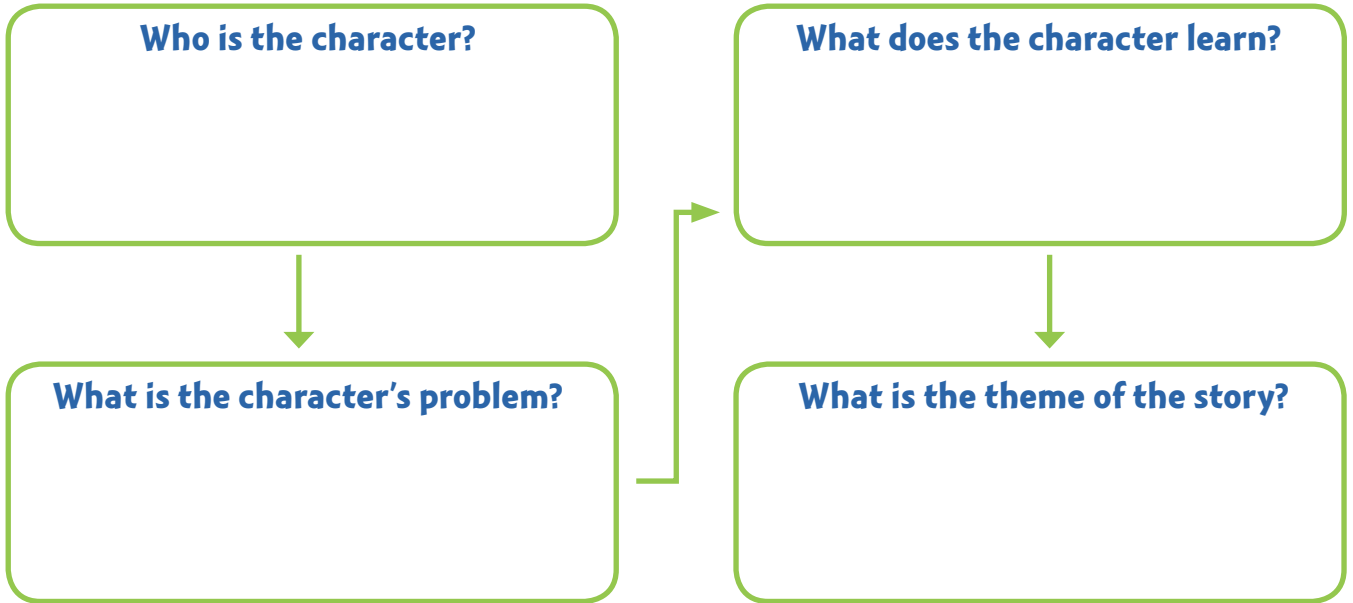
- 4 **Short Response** Use the information in your chart to write about the theme, or lesson, that can be learned from the girls' experience. Support your response with details from the story. Use the space provided on page 141 to write your response.

HINT Characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions can help reveal why they behaved as they did.



Claudine's Tack Attack

3 Use the Theme Chart below to organize your ideas.



Write Use the space below to write your answer to the question on page 139.

4 Short Response Use the information in your chart to write about the theme, or lesson, that can be learned from the girls' experience. Support your response with details from the story.

HINT Characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions can help reveal why they behaved as they did.

WORDS TO KNOW

As you read, look inside, around, and beyond these words to figure out what they mean.

- **courtesy**
- **determined**
- **disobedient**

FROM Sir Ivaine

by Maude L. Radford,
King Arthur and His Knights

- 1 Among Arthur's Knights of the Round Table was one who was a mixture of good and bad, as indeed most people are. His name was Sir Ivaine; brave, kind-hearted, and merry; but at the same time fickle, sometimes forgetful of his promises, and inclined to make light of serious things.
- 2 One night, in the early spring, the knights and ladies of Arthur's Court were sitting in the dining-hall. . . .
- 3 Sir Ivaine was telling of his experience with the Black Knight.
- 4 "It was when I was very young," he said; "indeed, I had just been made a knight. Some one told me of the wicked Black Knight who lived, and still lives, in a wood a long way from here. Knowing that he did much evil, I determined to kill him. I rode to the wood where he lived, and in which I found a marble platform. In the middle of it was a sunken space holding a fountain. I walked to this, and following the directions of some writing which was on the stone, picked up a cup that lay at hand, and filling it with water, poured it into the fountain.
- 5 "Then a great storm of wind and rain arose, and when it was at its height the Black Knight rode up and began to attack me. We fought for a little while, but he easily overthrew me. Thinking me dead, he rode back, leaving me on the ground. But after a time I was able to mount my horse, and went back to my mother's castle."
- 6 At this moment the king and the queen entered, unperceived by any one except Sir Ivaine. The young man, who was always polite, sprang to his feet; then the other knights rose. Sir Kay, who was not always sweet-tempered, said to Sir Ivaine:
- 7 "We all know that you are very polite, but you have more courtesy than bravery."

8 At that Sir Ivaine said: “I was almost a boy when the Black Knight overthrew me, but I could conquer him now.”

9 “It is very easy to say that after you have eaten,” said Sir Kay. “Almost any knight feels brave and self-satisfied when he has had a good supper of venison.”

10 The king asked what the conversation was about, and Sir Ivaine repeated the story of his adventure, adding: “And, Sir King, I crave your permission to set forth to-morrow to slay this Black Knight who is a pest in the land.”

11 “I have heard of this man,” said the king, “and have often thought of sending some one to punish him. But he lives far away, and it has been necessary heretofore to right first the wrongs nearest home. Yet now his evil deeds and persecutions must cease. Tomorrow a company of us will set forth and conquer him and all his people.”

12 The king named some half-dozen of his knights, Sir Ivaine among them, who were to undertake this adventure.

13 Sir Ivaine was displeased; he thought that the adventure should be his alone. So he rose in the middle of the night and stole away unattended, determined to go in advance of the others and kill the Black Knight. It did not occur to him that in proving himself brave, he was also proving himself disobedient.



14 He rode forth in the darkness, humming merrily to himself. . . . After many days of travel, Sir Ivaine reached the forest in the midst of which was the castle of the Black Knight. He rode to the platform of stone, [and] the Black Knight appeared.

15 He recognized the armor of Sir Ivaine, and said: “Aha! I see I did not kill you before, but you shall not escape me this time.”

16 “The best man shall win,” said Sir Ivaine, cheerfully.

17 Then the two began a great combat. . . . [They] fought so eagerly that they were not even aware of the storm. It was not long before the Black Knight began to grow weak from the many powerful and death-dealing strokes from Sir Ivaine’s sword. At last, seeing that he was mortally wounded, the Black Knight turned his horse. [He] galloped in the direction of his castle.

18 . . . Sir Ivaine followed. But he could not quite catch up with the Black Knight, although gaining on him inch by inch. By the time the castle moat was reached, Sir Ivaine was only five feet behind. The horses thundered one after the other over the bridge. The Black Knight rode under the portcullis, or sharp iron gate, which was raised. The instant he was inside, the portcullis fell, in order to shut out Sir Ivaine.

19 But Sir Ivaine had already passed beneath it. [He] sprang to his feet and drew his sword to renew his attack upon the Black Knight, but he was already dead

20 Then Sir Ivaine realized what his recklessness had cost him. There he was, alone in a strange castle, the lord of which he had killed. Soon the people of the castle would come and capture him, for he could not escape, since the portcullis was down. . . .



Think Use what you learned from reading the legend to respond to the following questions.

- 1** This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then answer Part B.

Part A

In paragraph 7, Sir Kay says that Sir Ivaine is more polite than brave. Which statement below describes how Sir Ivaine tries to show that Sir Kay is wrong?

- A** Sir Ivaine wants to prove that he can be both kind-hearted and polite.
- B** Sir Ivaine wants to prove that he can defeat the Black Knight by himself.
- C** Sir Ivaine wants to prove that he can be brave after a good meal of venison.
- D** Sir Ivaine wants to prove that he can lead the company of knights.

Part B

Which statement below **best** supports the answer in Part A?

- A** "Among Arthur's Knights of the Round Table was one who was a mixture of good and bad, as indeed most people are."
- B** "'I have heard of this man,' said the king, 'and have often thought of sending someone to punish him.'"
- C** "'. . . Sir King, I crave your permission to set forth to-morrow to slay this . . . pest in the land.'"
- D** "It did not occur to him that in proving himself brave, he was also proving himself disobedient."

- 2** Read the sentence from the passage.

Sir Ivaine was displeased; he thought that the adventure should be his alone.

What does the prefix *dis-* mean in the word displeased?

- A** over
 - B** not
 - C** again
 - D** under
- 3** Reread paragraph 13. How is Sir Ivaine’s response to the king’s plan important to the theme of the story?
- A** It shows he thought the knights named by the king were cowardly.
 - B** It shows he thought the Black Knight could be defeated quickly and easily.
 - C** It shows he did not think that evil deeds should go unpunished.
 - D** It shows he did not think carefully about what he was about to do.
- 4** Read the sentence from paragraph 20.

Then Sir Ivaine realized what his recklessness had cost him.

Which **three** statements **best** describe how the consequences of Sir Ivaine’s actions support a story theme?

- A** Sir Ivaine had learned how to win a fight.
- B** Sir Ivaine needed to find a new company of knights.
- C** Sir Ivaine had shown the king he was disobedient.
- D** Sir Ivaine needed to prove himself again to the king.
- E** Sir Ivaine had put his life in great danger.
- F** Sir Ivaine would be embarrassed if he returned home.
- G** Sir Ivaine would have little hope of escape.



Write

5 Short Response What lesson does Sir Ivaine learn in this passage? How does his experience relate to the theme in the story? Use details from the passage to support your answer.



Learning Target

In this lesson, you learned to identify the theme of a story by using details in the text. How did learning to identify the theme help you better understand the story?
