

# Theme Development Tracker

The *theme* of a narrative text is an underlying idea or value found throughout the text. The theme can be a moral or a lesson, but it does not have to be. Learning to identify themes can be difficult, but it is an important comprehension skill for students can develop. Middle- and upper-grade students can use this resource to identify and track themes in a literary text. Includes step-by-step instructions and a graphic organizer.

## Additional Resource

For more information on theme, read our previous blog post [“Supporting Your Children’s and Teens’ Home Learning: Identifying Themes in Literary Text”](#) by Leah Zimmerman, Ph.D., and Deborah K. Reed, Ph.D.

# Theme Development Tracker

## Overview of Theme

A *theme* of a literary text is the underlying idea or universal value (e.g., love, honesty, loyalty, sacrifice, fairness, forgiveness) that applies to everyone. A theme may be a moral or lesson, but this is not always the case. **Themes do not mention characters, plot, or others textual details in a text.** Instead, themes are general messages to the reader that could apply to many different situations outside of the text itself. Importantly, a literary text can have multiple themes. For example, one theme in a story may be that we all have the opportunity to be heroic. An event in which a character must choose whether or not to risk her own safety by helping someone she thought was her enemy is a textual detail that develops the theme.

These are some additional examples of possible themes in literary texts:

- Honesty and courage
- Perseverance, or “never giving up”
- Prejudice and self-worth

In contrast, the following **are not** themes, as they mention textual details, such as characters, settings, and plot:

- In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch has to stand up for what is right
- Harry Potter’s bravery at Hogwarts
- The prejudice faced by the Logan family in the book *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

Learning to identify themes can improve your understanding of literary texts. However, identifying themes can be tricky. Fortunately, there are several strategies you can use to identify themes while reading.

## Using the Theme Development Tracker

You can use this Theme Development Tracker to practice these strategies. Follow the instructions below to use the Theme Development Tracker.

1. There are several clues you can use to identify textual details that may be introducing or developing a theme. As you read, watch for the following clues:
  - a. **Advice:** A character receives advice about an important event or decision.
  - b. **Epiphany:** A character has an epiphany, or an important realization, that helps the character better understand an event or make a decision.

- c. **Memory:** A character remembers an event that occurred previously and describes it in detail. The memory helps the reader understand character traits, motivations, and actions
- d. **Reflection:** A character reflects on the impact of an event or lesson learned.
- e. **Repetition:** A particular idea or value is repeated throughout the text.

If you encounter one of these types of situations in the text, stop and ask yourself the following questions to identify the theme:

- What is the underlying idea in the story that could apply to anyone?
  - Is there a universal value (e.g., love, honesty, loyalty, sacrifice, fairness, forgiveness) that connects multiple characters or events?
  - Is there a lesson the reader is supposed to learn?
2. In the “theme” row, record the particular theme being communicated by the author.
  3. In the “Introduction of the theme” row, record the textual detail in which the author began to communicate this theme to the reader. You may write a direct quotation or paraphrase a longer portion of the text. It is important that you record the page number(s) on which you found this textual detail.
  4. After recording the theme and its introduction, keep tracking its development in the text. Be on the lookout for additional details that may be specific examples of the theme in action. Record the additional details and their page numbers in the “Detail that develops the theme” rows underneath the theme.
  5. Keep watching for the introduction of new themes, and be sure to record each new theme, its related textual details, and the page numbers on which each occurred.

# Theme Development Tracker

Theme	1.	2.	3.
Introduction of the theme (p. ___)			
Detail that develops the theme (p. ___)			
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