About This Lesson:
Theme/Central Idea

Common Core State Standards

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<th>Grade 6</th>
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<td><strong>RL 2</strong> Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details.</td>
<td><strong>RL 2</strong> Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text.</td>
<td><strong>RL 2</strong> Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot.</td>
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Lesson Objectives
Tell students that, in this lesson, they will learn to
- define theme
- distinguish between a theme and a topic
- identify clues that help to communicate theme
- infer a theme and support it with details

Strategies for Teaching
How you use this interactive lesson will reflect your personal teaching style, your instructional goals, and your available technological tools. For example, Theme/Central Idea can work well as both a whole-class lesson or as a targeted small-group skill review.

Here are teaching tips for each screen in the lesson.

SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW

Screen 2: What Are Life’s Lessons?
Encourage students to come up with a number of possible lessons for each scenario. Students should explain what makes them think of the lessons they list. Guide students to list the lessons in complete sentences.

Sample Lessons
- **Scenario 1**: Trying new experiences can be rewarding. Things aren’t always as bad as they first seem.
- **Scenario 2**: It’s important to follow your instincts. You’ll regret it if you don’t stand up for what you believe in. Guilt is a powerful emotion. Don’t always go along with the crowd.

Then ask: What experiences have you had or observed where you learned a life lesson?
Screen 3: The Power of Life’s Lessons
Encourage students to discuss how the lessons they’ve learned from their own experiences have affected them. Ask:
- How have you used a life lesson to help you make a decision?
- When has a life lesson helped you understand someone’s behavior? Or your own behavior?

LEARN THE SKILL

Screen 4: What Can Literature Teach Us?
Discuss with students that literary texts can mean different things to different people, so one story may have several themes or messages. As an example, ask a volunteer to retell the fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood.” Then, have students jot down possible lessons or themes of the fairy tale, such as: *Appearances can be deceiving. Don’t talk to strangers. Obey your elders. Don’t trust everyone you meet.*

Screens 5 and 17: Topic vs. Theme
First, remind students that a topic does not teach a lesson or offer an opinion about life, while a theme does. Then, discuss the examples and have students add possible themes for each topic. After the activity, ask students to list other themes they may be familiar with from television shows, movies, or stories.

Screen 6: Clues That Reveal Theme
After reviewing all the clues, ask students: Based on these clues, what themes can you infer? How do the clues support your themes? (Possible themes include: *Be grateful for what you have; greed can lead to foolish decisions.*)

Explain that students can follow a similar process for analyzing clues when looking for themes on their own.

Screen 7: Track the Clues
Possible Answers:
- **Title:** The title suggests that the grandfather and the grandson are important characters.
- **Plot/Conflict:** The main conflict focuses on the son and his wife’s cruel treatment of the grandfather. In the end, they recognize their cruelty and change their ways.
- **Characters:** The son and his wife are intolerant of the old grandfather. They make him eat out of a wooden dish. When they see their son making a wooden bucket for *them*, they realize that they will receive the same cruel treatment one day.
- **Setting:** The family may be too poor to afford new dishes.

Screen 8: Infer Theme
Students should be encouraged to offer as many additional themes as they can. To stimulate discussion, ask:
• What lessons do the different characters in the story learn?
• What does this story tell you about human behavior?
• What advice would you give the characters in this story?

Screen 9: Tips for Analyzing Theme
Give students time to work through the sentence frames on their own or in small groups. Encourage them to refer back to the novel or story, if possible. After students have completed the frames, ask for volunteers to share their answers aloud or on the whiteboard. Ask students to explain their thought processes by asking: What evidence in the text supports your statements?

PRACTICE & APPLY

Screens 10 and 18: Track the Clues in a Fable
Tell students that many well-known fables are attributed to Aesop, an ancient Greek folk hero who may have lived in the 6th century. In some fables, the moral is directly stated at the end. When the moral is not directly stated, readers can infer it by examining the characters’ behavior. The characters are usually animals with human characteristics.

After students have analyzed the fable, ask: What do the highlighted details reveal about Fox’s personality? (Fox is clever.) What can you tell about Crow’s personality, based on the underlined text? (Crow loves praise and is gullible.)

Screen 11: Infer Theme in a Fable
Help students look for other themes in the fable by asking:
• What does the fox learn from this experience?
• What does the fable tell you about human behavior?
• What does the fable reveal about life?
• How do you think the crow might change as a result of this experience?

Students may also enjoy writing their own short fable based on one of the themes they identify.

Screens 12 and 19: Track the Clues in a Poem
To extend the discussion, ask students:
• What might a “narrow nest” represent? And “the cordons around me”?
• What other setting details does the speaker mention?
• The author titled the poem “Your World,” not “My World.” Why might she have made this choice?

Screen 13: Infer Theme in a Poem
Review with students the definition of metaphor. Then ask: How is the speaker like a bird? (The speaker never ventures outside her “narrowest nest, but then she battles her fears and soars to great heights.)
After students identify the two correct themes, ask: What other themes might this poem convey? (Example: Change can sometimes be hard.)

**Screen 14: Wing It**
Encourage students to come up with other possible themes. Ask:
- What kinds of “little things” might the poet be talking about?
- Why is it important to think about the “little things”?
- To what situations might this life lesson apply?

**Screen 15: Spin a Theme**
**Sample Theme Statements:**
- **Hope:** Never lose hope.
- **Home:** There’s no place like home.
- **Second Chances:** In life, there are no second chances.
- **Survival:** Persistence is the key to survival.
- **Love:** Love can overcome all.
- **Family:** There’s no such thing as a typical family.
- **Jealousy:** Don’t let jealousy get its claws in you.
- **Fear:** It’s important to face your fears.

**Screen 16: Tic-Tac-Toe**
Divide students into two teams: X and O. The first team to get three in a row (across, down, or diagonally), or the most number of squares, wins. As the teacher, you’re the final judge of whether or not the example fits the theme. If you’re unfamiliar with a work a student cites, ask him or her to summarize the work and explain how it fits the theme.

To add excitement and keep the game moving, impose a time limit on teams for providing an answer.

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**Note:** Printable versions of all public-domain selections in this lesson are available on the following pages of this document.
“The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson”
retold by Leo Tolstoy

The grandfather had become very old. His legs would not carry him, his eyes could not see, his ears could not hear, and he was toothless. When he ate, bits of food sometimes dropped out of his mouth. His son and his son’s wife no longer allowed him to eat with them at the table. He had to eat his meals in the corner near the stove.

One day they gave him his food in a bowl. He tried to move the bowl closer; it fell to the floor and broke. His daughter-in-law scolded him. She told him that he spoiled everything in the house and broke their dishes, and she said that from now on he would get his food in a wooden dish. The old man sighed and said nothing.

A few days later, the old man’s son and his wife were sitting in their hut, resting and watching their little boy playing on the floor. They saw him putting together something out of small pieces of wood. His father asked him, “What are you making, Misha?”

The little grandson said, “I’m making a wooden bucket. When you and Mamma get old, I’ll feed you out of this wooden dish.”

The young peasant and his wife looked at each other and tears filled their eyes. They were ashamed because they had treated the old grandfather so meanly, and from that day they again let the old man eat with them at the table and took better care of him.
“The Fox and the Crow”
by Aesop

A Crow sat on a branch of a tree with a piece of cheese in her beak when a Fox saw her and set his wits to discover some way of getting the cheese. Standing under the tree he looked up and said, “What a noble bird I see! Her beauty is without equal, the hue of her plumage exquisite. If only her voice is as sweet as her looks are fair, she ought to be Queen of the Birds.” The Crow was hugely flattered by this, and just to show the Fox that she could sing she gave a loud caw. Down came the cheese, and the Fox, while snatching it up, said, “You have a voice, madam, I see: what you want is wits.”

“Your World”
by Georgia Douglas Johnson

Your world is as big as you make it
I know, for I used to abide
In the narrowest nest in a corner
My wings pressing close to my side

But I sighted the distant horizon
Where the sky-line encircled the sea
And I throbbed with a burning desire
To travel this immensity.

I battered the cordons around me
And cradled my wings on the breeze
Then soared to the uttermost reaches
with rapture, with power, with ease!
“Little Things”
by Ebenezer Cobham Brewer

Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean
And the pleasant land.

Thus the little minutes,
Humble though they be,
Make the mighty ages
Of eternity.