

Lesson 9

Determining the Theme of a Story



Learning Target

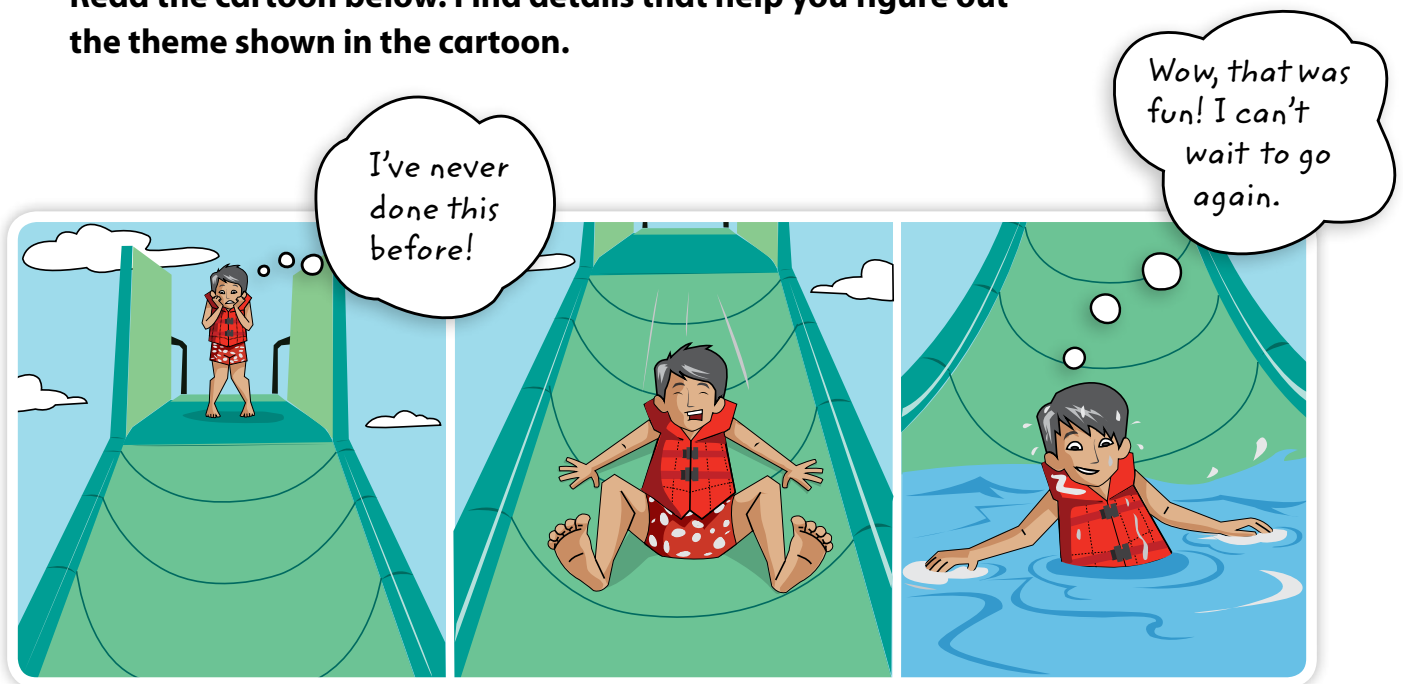


Using details in the text to identify the theme of a story will help you understand the story's important message, or lesson.

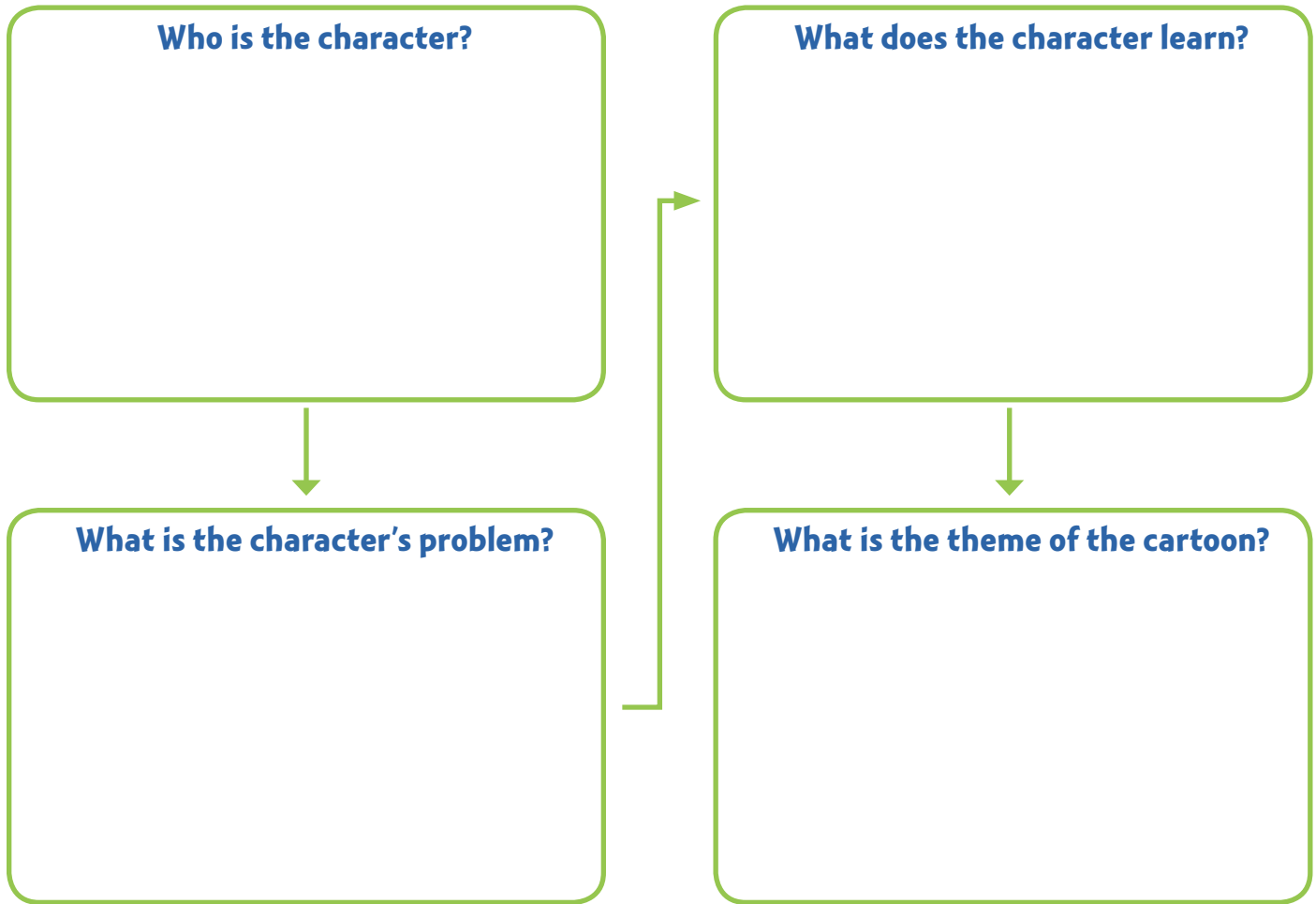
- **Read** Most story authors want to share an important message or lesson about people or life called the **theme**. Normally, authors do not state the theme directly. Instead, they expect their readers to **infer** the theme from what happens in the story.

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.

