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 THEME AND SYMBOL

The central message or insight about life conveyed through a literary work is known as the **theme**. Themes sometimes are stated directly. When they are implied, or suggested, readers can identify them by making inferences from text details. For example, a poem that describes parent birds feeding their young might express the theme that all living creatures need to take care of the next generation.

A **symbol** is a real thing that represents a larger, abstract idea. Like other kinds of text elements, symbols can relate to themes. For example, a heart is often a symbol for love, and a story that keeps referring to the heart may well be a poem about the value of love.

 **A. Directions:** For each item, name one thing for which it could be a symbol.

 1. a violent storm

 2. a flying eagle

 3. a lamp

 **B. Directions:** Read the following poem. Then, circle or highlight the letter of the correct answer to each question.

Ellen awoke, something was not right.

Her locket had vanished somehow, overnight!

She looked on the table and then by the door,

It was a gift from her friend, something she always wore.

Her friend was gone, moved away last spring.

Now Ellen was frantic—where was that thing?

Searching for an hour, she looked on the ground—

Finally! There it was—her locket, all safe and sound.

As Ellen ate breakfast she thought of her friend,

And felt how she missed her. So, in the end,

She picked up the phone. Oh, how long had it been

Since she’d heard the dear voice of her long-distance friend?

 1. What does the symbol of the locket represent?

 A. friendship C. a heart

 B. breakfast D. grief and loss

 2. What is the theme of the poem? Explain your answer, based on the details of the poem.

 A. We should always be neat, because then everything stays in its place.

 B. We should make time for friends, even when they’re far away.

 C. A beautiful piece of jewelry can be as precious as a best friend.

 D. One person’s trash is another person’s treasure.

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 THEME AND SYMBOL

 **Directions:** Read the passage. Then, answer the questions that follow.

Leonard couldn’t believe what lousy friends he had. All day at school, no one had even mentioned that it was his birthday! They all acted as if it was just another ordinary day. Even his parents hadn’t said anything that morning at breakfast. How could they have forgotten? After school, he slammed his locker door shut and started to walk home, muttering to himself. Along the way, Leonard noticed a single barren tree in the middle of an empty field. He had seen it many times before, but today, somehow it took on a special meaning for him. He stopped muttering, sighed sadly, and walked slowly to his house.

As he put his key into the lock and opened the door, he was surprised to see that all of the lights were off. And he could swear that he heard someone giggling in the dark. Maybe he was imagining it? But as his hand fumbled for the light switch, his nose suddenly picked up the wonderful scent of warm chocolate. And then he knew! He smiled just before the lights flashed on and the balloons dropped. They had remembered!

 1. What emotion does Leonard feel at the beginning of the story, and why?

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 2. What emotion does Leonard feel when he sees the bare tree? How can you tell?

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 3. The tree suddenly has a “special meaning” for Leonard. What might the tree symbolize to him? Explain.

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 4. What happens at the end of the story, and how does it make Leonard feel?

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 5. What theme, or idea about life, do all the parts of the story work together to express? Explain your answer, using details from the story.

 CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Authors craft dialogue so that the characters’ diction (word choice), syntax (order or arrangement of words), and punctuation contribute to **character development**. In other words, the way in which a character speaks suggests aspects of the character’s personality and background. For example, a character who says, “Those clouds look like a bunny!” will come across as more childlike and excited than one who says, “The clouds to the north of us resemble a rabbit.” The punctuation, word choice, and syntax of the two speakers characterize them in contrasting ways.

**Directions:** Read the passage. Then, answer the questions that follow.

 My little cousin Sandy said to my aunt, “Mommy! We were just walking over across the lawn, and we saw the biggest ol’ bug you’re ever gonna see! It’s like a giant sparkly fly. It’s on the tree. Come and look! What is it?”

 Aunt Becca walked over to the tree. “Yes, it’s a beautiful cicada. I love its iridescent green color. Cicadas spend most of their lives underground. They can live to be seventeen years old.”

 “Ooooo—so pretty!”

 1. Think about Sandy’s diction and syntax in the passage. Which of the following descriptions **best** characterizes her?

 A. thoughtful and scientific

 B. curious and enthusiastic

 C. silly and fearful

 2. How does Aunt Becca’s syntax characterize her?

 A. Aunt Becca’s simple sentence structures indicate that she speaks poorly and is not well educated.

 B. Aunt Becca’s simple sentence structures indicate that she knows how to explain things to small children.

 C. Aunt Becca’s simple sentence structures indicate that she is annoyed with Sandy and is speaking curtly to her.

 3. Which of the following sounds the **most** like something Aunt Becca would say next, based on her syntax and diction in the passage?

 A. You can hear cicadas in the summer. They have a wonderful, haunting song.

 B. And gosh—you should hear the racket those bugs make in the summer!

 C. The cicada is in the order *Hemiptera*, with species extent in most temperate and

Tropical climates around the planet

 CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

**Directions:** Read the passage. Then, answer the questions that follow.

 “Hey, those are cute shoes! Listen, I really, really, reeeaaallly need your help. Okay?” said Ann.

 “My shoes are not ‘cute’; they are classic, though I doubt you appreciate their timelessness. What can it be this time?” replied Maggie.

 “Well, I didn’t really have time to get the reading done. And there’s a quiz. I thought, you know, that you could just tell me all the stuff that happens after Chapter 1.”

 Maggie answered her: “You cannot be serious. And—the nerve of it—I certainly cannot facilitate your attempts to succeed in life solely by means of strategic incompetence.”

 **1.** Describe Ann’s diction, or use of words. Give specific examples of word choice that support your description.

 **2.** Describe Maggie’s diction, or use of words. Give specific examples of word choice that support your description.

 **3.** Describe how diction and syntax characterize Ann and Maggie. What does the reader learn about Ann and Maggie just from the way they speak?

 COMPLEX CHARACTERS

**Complex characters** keep you guessing as you read: They struggle with internal conflict; they act on the basis of different **motivations**, or reasons; they show inconsistent **traits** or qualities, and they sometimes change from the beginning of the story to the end. The way in which complex characters deal with conflicts and struggle with differing motivations advances the plot of a story. Identifying the complexity of characters—differing motivations, changing traits—also provides clues to the **theme** of a selection, or the central insight the author is trying to emphasize. For example, if the main character in a story struggles with his or her family’s expectations before deciding to act on his or her own instincts, the story might have a theme about being true to oneself.

 **Directions:** Use the chart below to help you describe the complex character of the Creature in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Read the description. Then, answer the questions that follow.

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| **What are the Creature’s internal and external conflicts? Mention his traits in your answer.** |
| **How do you think the Creature’s motivations change?** |
| **How does the Creature** **change because of his experiences?** |
| **Review your answers. What theme, or lesson, seems to be expressed through the Creature’s experiences and conflicts?** |

**Complex Character: Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein**

Dr. Frankenstein’s monster, “the Creature,” is the opposite of a zombie: Instead of being “undead,” he is “unalive.” He is a monstrous being who dwells among humans; however, because of his taut yellow skin, watery eyes, stiff-legged gait, and enormous size, he is reviled.

The Creature may be a monster, but he does have feelings. He is sensitive. Eventually, he learns to speak and becomes well mannered. He desperately wants company, but he is attacked and rejected everywhere he goes. Because he is shunned, he seeks revenge on the scientist who brought him to life. In the end, the sensitive monster becomes an unsympathetic character

 AUTHOR’S POINT OF VIEW AND STRUCTURE

 COMPLEX CHARACTERS

 **Directions:** Read the description of this fictional character. Then, answer the questions that follow.

**COMPLEX CHARACTER: DR. MARY JOHNSON**

Mary Johnson was raised in the late nineteenth century, a time when expectations of what women could and should do were drastically different from what they are today. Women of her time generally weren’t expected to finish school, and certainly they were not meant not to go on to higher education or to seek a career outside of the home.

At first, young Mary was resigned to becoming a wife and mother. She was meek in spirit and submissive to her parents. However, a burning desire for learning took hold of her during her late teens. Despite her family’s wishes, Mary became determined to gain an education. She finished school and applied to college. Against all odds, she was accepted. Although her parents and well-meaning friends tried to discourage her ambitions, Mary enrolled in medical school. She became the first woman to receive her medical degree at that school.

An **author’s point of view** is the perspective he or she takes when telling events. For example, an author’s far-off point of view would indicate that events happened long ago. When using a far-off point of view, the author might write as a detached observer who tells just the facts, or as a thoughtful observer who reflects on the events. Alternately, the author might have a close-up point of view, making it seem as if events are happening right now. When using a close-up point of view, the author is often an active participant in the events.

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| **What are Mary’s internal and external conflicts? Mention her traits in your answer.** |
| **How do you think Mary’s motivations change?** |
| **How does Mary change because of her experiences?** |
| **Review your answers. What theme, or lesson, seems to be expressed through Mary’s experiences and conflicts?** |

The **structure** of a piece of writing refers to its overall organization and how an author puts together its various parts. For example, authors might use different points of view to present different parts of a memoir.

**Directions:** Read the passage. Then, answer the questions that follow.

My mother and father met in London’s National Gallery in the early 1980s. My mother worked there as a docent, guiding visitors and telling them all about the different works of art and the lives of the artists who made them. My father worked as a graphic designer, and he liked to visit the gallery and wander among the great works for inspiration. After he met my mother, he took the tour six times before he gathered up the nerve to ask her out.

My mother’s eyes light up as she tells me this story. She giggles as she describes my father following her around the museum with his notebook, pretending to take notes each time he took the tour. I like imagining them like this, young and in love and just starting their life together. She shows me old photographs as I pack my bags. I am about to take a train to London to work at the very same gallery. I will be an assistant in the conservation department, cleaning and restoring old works of art. My mother says I have inherited my parents’ love of beauty and my father’s patience.

 1. In the first paragraph, is the author’s point of view close up, or far off? Explain.

 2. Is the author an active participant in the first paragraph, or an observer? Explain.

 3. In the second paragraph, is the author’s point of view close up, or far off? Explain.

 4. Is the author an active participant in the second paragraph, or an observer? Explain.

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 AUTHOR’S POINT OF VIEW AND STRUCTURE

**Directions:** Read the passage. Then, answer the questions that follow.

I walked with my father across the grass toward my new high school, nervously watching the other kids. My mouth was agape as I stared at their purple spiked hair and spray-painted purple sweatshirts. As Dad and I entered the building and met the principal, a boy leaped over the banister from several steps up and landed in front of me, laughing. I jumped back and looked at the principal.

“Hey, Jordan,” he said to the kid, smiling. My jaw dropped again. I had expected the principal to send Jordan to detention. Who were these crazy kids with their purple hair?

It would be days before I learned that I’d arrived on the day of the big pep rally, right before the homecoming football game. The crazy purple hair wasn’t permanent—it was just the kids’ way of showing their school spirit.

It would be years before I could look back with appreciation and amusement at those first few days in an American high school. At the time, it had seemed terrifying and chaotic, but I came to respect the smiling, relaxed principal—and to enjoy dyeing my hair purple for school spirit.

 1. In the first two paragraphs, is the author’s point of view close up, or far off? Explain.

 2. Is the author an active participant in the first two paragraphs, or a reflective observer? Explain.

 3. In the last two paragraphs, is the author’s point of view close up, or far off? Explain.

 4. Is the author an active participant in the last two paragraphs, or a reflective observer? Explain.

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**Reading: Analyze Text Information**

Practice

Texts about the same topic can contain very different information. Someone writing about music, for example, could write about how music is composed, why people make music, or a favorite kind of music. It is important, then, to **analyze text information** to determine a text’s main idea and the author’s purpose. Here are some things to look for when you analyze text information:

● What does the author want you to understand? (main idea)

● How does the author support the main idea? (supporting details)

● Is the author trying to describe or explain something, to persuade readers to take a position, or to tell a story? (author’s purpose)

**Read the following excerpt. Then, answer the questions that follow.**

**Visit Mexico!**

Mexico has beaches, mountains, history, culture, and so much more! It is a foreign country on our own doorstep, filled with charm and excitement.

Mexico City, the capital of Mexico, is a special treat. It is the oldest city in North America. Built more than 450 years ago by the Aztecs, visitors can still see ancient pyramids in a bustling, modern city.

**1.** What is the main idea of this brochure?

**2.** What details support the main idea?

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**3.** What is the author’s purpose? Explain your answer.

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**Reading: Analyze Text Information**

Assess

**Read this excerpt from an atlas entry. Then, answer the questions that follow.**

**Mexico**

Quick Facts

Capital: Mexico City

Major Language: Spanish

Population: 109,000

Location

Mexico forms a link between the United States, to its north, and Central America, to its south. The Pacific Ocean borders Mexico on the west, while the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea form its eastern border.

Place

Mexico is a narrow country with large mountain ranges near its East and West coasts. Because it lies on several of Earth’s tectonic plates, Mexico has many volcanoes and has been rocked by major earthquakes.

Region

Mexico’s terrain is so varied that it has several climate zones. The south has a tropical climate, while the north is more temperate. The north also has many dry areas, while the south has a higher annual rainfall. In addition, the climate in the mountains varies by altitude, with the lowest temperatures in the highest mountains and the highest temperatures near the coasts.

**1.** What is the main idea of this atlas entry?

**2.** What details support the main idea?

**3.** What is the author’s purpose? Explain your answer.

**4.** What might you expect to see in the rest of this entry?

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 AUTHOR’S CLAIMS AND IDEAS

An **argumentative essay** aims to convince the reader of the validity of the author’s **claim**—the opinion or main point the author is arguing. In an effective argumentative essay, the author supports the claim with logical reasoning and verifiable evidence, usually using the following structure:

• An **introduction** that presents the topic and claim in a clear, interesting way

• A **body** that presents reasons for agreeing with the claim and that offers sufficient, reliable evidence for those reasons

• A **conclusion** that restates or summarizes the claim and leaves the reader with something to think about or with a call to action

**Directions:** Read this argumentative essay. Then, answer the questions that follow.

As a student who is getting tired of being crammed into classrooms with 35 or more other students at a time, I am all in favor of smaller class sizes. For one thing, the larger the class, the more difficult it is for a teacher to keep order. And when a class ceases to be orderly, it becomes very hard to pay attention and learn. In addition, as surveys of teachers and principals have shown, teachers believe that smaller class sizes are the best way to improve the quality of their teaching. Furthermore, studies have shown that a smaller class size allows for more individualized attention, helping to ensure that students can master course material and progress to the next grade instead of having to repeat a grade. Yes, smaller class sizes means more teachers and more teacher salaries—but when you consider the benefits, don’t smaller class sizes make sense?

 1. State the writer’s claim in your own words.

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 2. In the body of the essay, what three reasons does the writer give to support the claim?

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 3. Name two pieces of evidence that the writer provides to support his or her ideas.

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 4. How does the writer conclude the essay?

 PURPOSE AND PERSUASION

A writer’s **purpose** may be to inform or explain, to persuade, to entertain, or to reflect. Those purposes direct a writer’s techniques, including the use of **persuasive appeals** to help the writer convince the reader that it is right to agree with his or her stance on a position. Here are three of the more common persuasive techniques that a writer may use to appeal to the reader:

**Appeal to Reason:** Persuasion that shows that an argument is well-reasoned and based on facts and data

**Example:** Studies show that thirty minutes of exercise three to four times a week has a significant impact on one’s health.

**Appeal to Authority:** Persuasion that derives from an expert supporting the ideas

**Example:** The Coast Guard warns that small boat craft are most affected by inclement weather.

**Appeal to Emotion:** Persuasion that appeals to readers’ feelings about a subject

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**Example:** Please donate canned goods to those in need this holiday.

**Directions:** Read each argument. Then, write whether the argument is mainly an appeal to **Reason**, to **Authority**, or to **Emotion**.

 1. We need to revise the school library budget so that we can give students access to the technology they need in order to learn.

 2. Our head coach says that after-school sports are essential because they instill a healthy competitive spirit as well as good sportsmanship.

 3. It’s important for our school to purchase new science lab equipment because the equipment we have is old and, in cases, hazardous.

 4. It’s only fair that we build a new football stadium because our home team has been to the National Championship four times, but has never had a field of its own!

 PURPOSE AND PERSUASION

 **A. Directions:** Read this argument. Then, answer the questions that follow.

The bridge in the middle of our town has become a home for disgusting bats, and it’s time for us to destroy the terrible bridge! Once, very recently, I was walking beneath the bridge when a squealing bat became entangled in my hair! I had to beg a horrified stranger to help me. Once the bridge is demolished, the bats will have to leave our town, and their reign of terror will be over. Anyone who thinks that bats are cute clearly has not done any research on what filthy animals they are!

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 1. What main persuasive appeal does the writer use in this argument? How can you tell?

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 2. Does the writer make a strong enough appeal to persuade you to agree with his or her stance? Why or why not?

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 **B. Directions:** On the lines below, write a persuasive argument either for or against the presence of soda machines in schools. Use the three persuasive techniques you’ve learned about to support your claim.

 CAUSE AND EFFECT

One way that writers develop a persuasive argument is by showing **cause-and-effect relationships**. These relationships identify a cause—why something happened—and an effect—what happened as a result. Of course, many issues have more than one cause and effect.

A **cause-and-effect chain** occurs when one cause results in an effect, which then becomes the cause of a second effect, and so on in a chain-like sequence.

**Directions:** Read the passage. Then, answer the questions that follow.

The California condor, North America’s largest bird, has been pulled from the brink of extinction. In the 1980s, when the number of California condors in the wild fell to fewer than 40 birds, scientists embarked on a controversial recovery program. They captured all of the birds and began breeding them in captivity. Condors are notoriously slow breeders—each adult female lays just one egg every one or two years—but the recovery program has been a success. More than 400 California condors are alive today; more than 100 now live in the wild and have formed small populations in California, Arizona, and Baja California.

Unfortunately, even though the released California condors are considered a protected species, they are still at risk. They are sometimes killed by power lines. They are also exposed to danger because they eat animal remains left by hunters. These remains are likely to contain lead bullet fragments. As a result, condors in the wild will sicken and die of lead poisoning unless they are periodically captured and treated.

 1. What were two effects of the number of California condors in the wild falling to fewer than 40?

 2. What caused the number of condors to rise to more than 400?

 3. What event(s) led to small populations of condors forming in California, Arizona, and Baja California?

 4. What is the effect of hunters’ use of lead bullets and shot?