Seeing Themes in Young Adult Literature – Grade Seven

Ohio Standards Connection

Reading Applications: Literary Text

Benchmark E
Demonstrate comprehension by inferring themes, patterns and symbols.

Indicator 5
Identify recurring themes, patterns and symbols found in literature from different eras and cultures.

Lesson Summary:
The lesson teaches/reviews the concept of theme. Students then explore common themes found in literature dealing with issues of adolescence. In the Post Assessment, students respond to a series of self-selected readings by identifying themes and the details which support and develop them. A mandatory extension activity allows students to respond to their reading and discussion with either a comparison paper or an open-ended original creation.

Estimated Duration: *15 days (45-minute periods)*

Commentary:
This lesson received very high marks from all reviewers. Reviewers strongly agreed that the pre-assessment was well-written and easy to use, and in the words of one reviewer, "a good introductory activity that would indicate right away how well the students grasp the idea of theme". The instructional procedures were also well received with comments such as, "the procedures are very thorough in what is to be expected", and "a good way to cover a variety of genres while teaching the benchmark associated with theme". Overall, the lesson was found to be grade-level appropriate and supportive of critical thinking skills and active student participation.

Pre-Assessment:
- Select three or four movies, stories or television programs with which the students are likely to be very familiar and initiate a discussion about their themes.
- As students respond, ask them to supply details from the plots that help them identify these themes.
- For each example, record on the blackboard or chart paper the theme and supporting details that the students offer.
- Have students brainstorm for other similar examples.

Scoring Guidelines:
Carefully observe to score this assessment. Note the reactions of students to the process. Look for difficulty in completing the activity. In particular, note students struggling to identify themes *or* who seem to lack the vocabulary to express their thoughts. Give these students direct instruction during the initial steps of the instructional procedures.

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Post-Assessment:
Have students develop a paragraph for each selection in their reading plan. For each reading selection the student should identify *and* explain the theme of the selection and at least three supporting details. The explanation of the details should clearly demonstrate how they built the concept of the theme in the piece.

Scoring Guidelines:
To assess the students' recognition and understanding of theme, score their paragraphs as advanced, proficient or needing further instruction.

- **Advanced:** All of the paragraphs correctly identify the theme(s) involved. In all, or nearly all, of the cases, paragraphs identify and explain appropriate details to demonstrate how the theme is built.
- **Proficient:** All of the paragraphs correctly identify the theme(s) involved. In most cases, details and explanations of how themes were developed are appropriate and valid.
- **Needing Further Instruction:** Most or all of the paragraphs have not identified themes correctly or are unable to express theme in a generally accepted form. Explanations and details offered are generally irrelevant, inappropriate or nonexistent.

Instructional Procedures:
Part One
1. Select a grade-appropriate short story, fable or mythological story which employs an overt theme.
2. Identify those characteristics and details in the piece which serve to build the theme.

Instructional Tip:
Tailor this lesson in many ways. This execution explores coming-of-age literature; however, other themes could be used, particularly in a multidisciplinary context, like courage, friendship, war or rebirth. Or, focus on comparative readings of creation myths of different cultures as a component of a larger study of world cultures. Since a number of excellent websites exist in the area of theme in literature, an Internet search for these in young adult literature should yield many other suggestions.

3. Explain that students are about to read a selection in which theme play(s) an important role. (Also, give any other introduction appropriate to the particular selection and context.) However, do not state or hint at the details of the theme.
4. Distribute the reading selection along with four or five self-adhesive tabs.
5. Instruct the students to read the selection carefully looking for and marking the details that support the theme. (If the selection is brief enough consider reading it aloud to the class.)
6. Emphasize that students can move markers around as they read.
7. Through class discussion, have the class construct a list of details that illustrate the theme.
8. Guide the discussion and act as recorder, giving as little prompting as possible in the list's construction.

9. Prepare an extensive reading list that features culturally and chronologically diverse literature that focuses on coming-of-age issues. Include mythology, fable, fiction and poetry; attempt to cover the entire range of reading abilities in the classroom.

Instructional Tips:
- Work with local libraries to create a sufficiently diverse list of reading materials.
- Consider obtaining multiple versions of the same mythological tales and fables in order to meet different reading levels. Also, consider the many resources available on Internet sites.
- Adjust the duration of the lesson by the length and complexity of the selections provided (for instance, novels vs. short stories).

10. Organize the reading list along the categories of Mythology, Fable, Fiction and Poetry.
11. Select those students who exhibited difficulty in Steps One through Seven to complete Attachment A, *Identifying Theme* (see also Attachment B, *Instructor's Notes Key for Themes Activity*). In addition to those students selected through the Pre-Assessment, invite any other students who feel uneasy in proceeding to take part in this direct instruction. (See Attachment B, *Instructor's Notes and Key for Themes Activity*.)
12. Explain to the remaining students that they are about to embark on a reading program that will focus on literature from and around the world and throughout the ages that deals with issues of growing up.
13. Make copies available of all the items on the reading list and give these remaining students the opportunity to begin browsing through the literature and to select at least two items from each category to include in their reading program for this lesson.
14. Have students record their choices and create a timeline for the completion of their reading.
15. As students complete their proposed plans, meet with them and review the realism of their goals and the appropriateness of their choices.
    - Ask guiding questions and provide further assistance and information as needed.
    - As best as possible, equalize the proposed length of individual plans.
    - Make copies of the final plan of approved reading selections.
    - Chart these selections for the class and arrange flexible groupings for overlapping readings.
    - Provide a copy of the sequence and groupings to all students.

Instructional Tip:
Do not give prior announcement of the intention to use grouping as social concerns may then unduly influence reading selection choices. Deal with grouping issues only after the selections are made.

16. Repeat Steps 12 through 15 with those students completing direct instruction (step three).
17. Use Attachment C, *Growing up in Different Ages and Places*, to introduce the remainder of the lesson.

Instructional Tips:

- At this point, group students tentatively based upon the individual reading plans created (see Attachment C, *Growing up in Different Ages and Places*).
- View the reading of the texts themselves as an ongoing and open-ended collaborative effort. The line between the instructional and Post-Assessment phases is not strict. The real Post-Assessment lies in the student's response to the assignment.
- Carefully monitor and facilitate all of the groups. Use a wide range of questioning techniques, graphic organizers and other comprehension strategies on an as-needed basis to aid in interpretation of the texts.
- Become very familiar with all of the texts in the individual reading plans to provide adequate support.
- Develop a realistic timeline for the groups after they have functioned for a while so it can be more attainable.
- If collaborative learning is not a regular part of the classroom, it may be necessary to review the roles of the team members.
- Organize mini-lessons and small teaching groups for review and reteaching of various aspects of the writing skills necessary to complete the individual papers and creative works.
- Consider the use of peer review as papers and projects develop. However, monitor this process to provide a check on issues of cultural sensitivity, hurt feelings, bullying, etc.
- Make a point to hold brief, informal individual progress conferences regularly as students begin to develop their Post-Assessment responses.

18. Have students complete the Post-Assessment as they progress through their reading plan.
19. Require students to complete one of the Extension activities.
20. Hold an open forum at the conclusion of the Post-Assessment and Extension activities (preferably after all have been submitted and evaluated). Have students reflect on the experience of the lesson, sharing what they have learned, how they feel about the process, etc. Offer the opportunity for students to submit comments and questions anonymously as well.

Differentiated Instructional Support:
Instruction is differentiated according to learner needs, to help all learners either meet the intent of the specified indicator(s) or, if the indicator is already met, to advance beyond the specified indicator(s).

- There is a great deal of differentiation built in to this lesson. To begin with, students have the opportunity to more fully develop their concept of theme and symbol before attempting to explore these in broader reaches of the multicultural and chronologically varied literary pieces.
- Multicultural exploration exists through out the program.
- Help students find a set of literature that works well at their individual instructional levels.
- The lesson permits flexibility of pacing and the possibility of fitting a number of learning styles through the creative-response option of the Post-Assessments.

- Focus a follow up reading plan exclusively on fables since fables typically have easily identifiable themes and broad details of development. Students identified in the Post-Assessment as needing further instruction should not be required to complete an extension activity, although the opportunity should still be made available to them eventually.

Extensions:
- Use Attachment C, *Growing up in Different Ages and Places*, to initiate Extension activities. Distribute copies of Attachment C, *Growing up in Different Ages and Places*, and review the handout with students.
- If necessary, review with students the steps in preparing a comparison and contrast essay.
- Help arrange multimedia materials for students who opt to take the creative option.
- Along with this lesson, arrange to have an exhibit of student work. Engage the students in planning for this exhibit. Consider doing it in conjunction with some other activity such as an open house, parent conferences, music or art programs, etc.
- Have students develop oral, video or computer presentations that help explain their work.
- A number of good journals exist for the publication of young adult creative work. Additionally, the Internet now offers many websites which accept student submissions. Encourage students to prepare for publication or to enter other art works in appropriate competitions.
- Supply extensive additional readings and research opportunities in myth, symbol, poetry, fable, etc.
- Use technology of various kinds. Internet searches, word processing skills and multimedia presentations logically extend the work here.

Instructional Tip
Focus the scoring of the student extension activity responses on the student's accurate recognition of theme and supporting details. However, recognition takes on some expression. Do not isolate the message without somehow responding to the form. Employ two separate rubrics in the scoring: Attachment E, *Rubric for Scoring Comparison and Contrast Essays* and Attachment F, *Rubric for Scoring Creative Response Projects*.

Home Connection:
- This is a great lesson to communicate not only objectives but actual content with parents. Prepare several home communiqués to coincide with the various stages in the process: an introductory newsletter, a copy and explanation of the individualized reading list and the group process, the Post-Assessment activity, the Extension activities and any related exhibits planned.
- Emphasize in home communications the connections between the students' readings and their own challenges as developing adolescents.

Materials and Resources:
The inclusion of a specific resource in any lesson formulated by the Ohio Department of Education should not be interpreted as an endorsement of that particular resource, or any of its contents, by the Ohio Department of Education. The Ohio Department of Education <u>does not</u>

endorse any particular resource. The Web addresses listed are for a given site's main page, therefore, it may be necessary to search within that site to find the specific information required for a given lesson. Please note that information published on the Internet changes over time, therefore the links provided may no longer contain the specific information related to a given lesson. Teachers are advised to preview all sites before using them with students.

For the teacher:	blackboard, white board or large chart pads; chalk or markers; Attachment A, *Identifying Theme*; Attachment B, *Instructor's Notes and Key for Themes Activity*; Attachment C, *Growing Up in Different Ages and Places*; Attachment D, Your Individual Project; Attachment *E,*, *Rubric for Scoring Comparison and Contrast Essays; Attachment F, Rubric for Scoring Creative Response Projects*
For the student:	colored, self-adhesive tabs; various multimedia resources dependent on the nature of student projects (see Instructional Procedure step nine and Attachment C, *Growing Up in Different Ages and Places*); Attachment A, *Identifying Theme*; Attachment D, *Your Individual Project*; Attachment E*, Rubric for Scoring Comparison and Contrast Essays*; Attachment F, *Rubric for Scoring Creative Response Projects*

<u>Vocabulary</u>:
- moral
- theme
- thesis

<u>Technology Connections</u>:
- Encourage students to seek other readings available on the World Wide Web.
- Give students ad hoc training in word processing.
- Provide individual instruction on the choice, design and appropriateness of presentation technologies.

<u>Research Connections</u>:
Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: Writing, Reading and Learning with Adolescents.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1987.

<u>The Writing Conference</u>
Status of the Class Conference
    In a whole class session, a simple call out is made to determine what each student is currently working on and where he/she is in the piece.
Conferring About Content
    Conducted one-on-one, the teacher should follow these guidelines:

1. Keep conferences short, a minute or two. Ask kids to tell you about the piece, not read the entire draft.

2. See as many writers as possible.
3. Go to the students so you can control the length of the conference and see many writers.
4. Make eye contact with the writer. Kneel or sit alongside their desks as necessary.
5. Don't tell writers what they should be writing, or worse, write on their pieces. Honor ownership.
6. Build on what writers know and have done, rather than focusing on the negatives.
7. Resist making judgments about the writing. If you say it's good, what motivation is there for improvement?
8. In questioning students, ask about something you're curious about as a person. Forget you're an English teacher.

Group Share Sessions
Group share meetings end each writing workshop and feature all the elements of individual conferences with one key difference. Here all writers respond to an individual writer's work. It's not show-and-tell but purposeful dialogue.

Topic Conferences
Use open-ended questions to help individual writers select topics.

Mini-lessons are 15- to 30-minute direct-instruction lessons designed to help students learn literacy skills and become more strategic readers and writers. In these lessons, students and the teacher are focused on a single goal; students are aware of why it is important to learn the skill or strategy through modeling, explanation and practice. Then independent application takes place using authentic literacy materials.

Cawletti, Gordon. *Handbook of Research on Improving Student Achievement.* Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service, 1999.

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES
- Encourage parents to stimulate their children's intellectual development.
- Incorporate direct teaching that exhibits key features and systematic steps.
- Teach students multiple learning strategies that promote metacognition by providing modeled, guided practice and application.
- Incorporate cooperative learning.

LANGUAGE ARTS (Squire 1995)
- Incorporate extensive reading of varied kinds of material.
- Foster interactive learning.
- Extend students' background knowledge.
- Utilize meaning-making skills and strategies such as summarizing, questioning and interpreting.
- Organize instruction into broad, thematically–based clusters of work.
- Teach critical reading/writing skills.
- Emphasize discussion and analysis.

- Stress the composing process.
- Provide balanced attention to different forms of reading, writing and speaking.
- Provide early intervention.
- Expose students to varied kinds of literature.

Zorfass, Judith, & Harriet Copel. "The I-Search: Guiding Students Toward Relevant Research." *Educational Leadership*. 53 (1995) 48-51.

The I-Search Strategy is an interdisciplinary, student-centered inquiry process that highlights children's conscious participation and ownership in planning and carrying out research. It also recognizes that children need to work together and that they should gain experience in sharing their findings with others in a variety of formats. The I-Search instructional framework has four basic steps:
1. Allow children to choose a motivating theme.
2. Allow children to formulate their own research plans.
3. Allow children to follow and revise their plans as they gather information.
4. Allow children to prepare papers as a foundation to sharing their findings through oral reports, skits, posters, experiments, or presentations using computer software.

General Tip:
- Use holistic rubrics in this lesson to permit maximum flexibility with student responses in the Post Assessment. A more analytic framework unnecessarily limits the open-ended nature of responses.

Attachments:
Attachment A, *Identifying Theme*
Attachment B, *Instructor's Notes and Key for Themes Activity*
Attachment C, *Growing up in Different Ages and Places*
Attachment D, *Your Individual Project*
Attachment E*, Rubric for Scoring Comparison and Contrast Essays*
   Attachment F, *Rubric for Scoring Creative Response Projects*

Attachment A
Identifying Theme

Name_____   Date_____

Identifying Theme

Directions: Identify each of the following statements as potentially a theme or not a theme. Remember that theme statements are of a general nature, that is to say, they make a generalization regarding life or present a general idea or area of examination. They may or may not be of a moral nature. They do not deal with specific details within a story or event. If a statement is not thematic in nature, explain why it is not.

1.   An alien attack force confronts humanoids on colony XG-300.
_____

2.   Gambling can have devastating consequences.
_____

3.   Oscar is driven off the team for his grouchiness.
_____

4.   Love does not always conquer prejudice.
_____

5.   Secrets can erode trust.
_____

6.   A rich count masks his true identity as a former political prisoner.
_____

7.   The crimes of one's ancestors often continue to lead to consequences for generations.
_____

8.   What constitutes cowardice?
_____

9.   A politician destroys old friends around him to climb to the top.
_____

10. Friends are often forgotten in the moment of one's success and celebrity.
_____

Attachment B
Instructor's Notes and Key for Themes Activity

Instructional Notes: "Identifying Theme"

1. Read through the directions with the students.
2. If necessary, use a brief fable with a moral as an example of a theme that is stated in a text.
3. Note to students that usually themes are not stated in a text, but that it is possible to create a statement that reflects the theme of a text. Such statements are always of a general nature.
4. Have one of the students read an item and allow the students to talk over the item

Instructional Tip:
If the group is too large to facilitate easy discussion, partner the students, then call on the groups separately to offer their ideas.

5. Emphasize that a statement that merely gives an event does not point to larger idea and is, therefore, not thematic.
6. If students are unable to recognize the nature of a statement, ask leading questions such as, "Does something actually happen in this statement?"
7. Work through the entire list until all students seem to be comfortable with what distinguishes each statement.

Key:
1. not a theme
2. theme
3. not a theme
4. theme
5. theme
6. not a theme
7. theme
8. theme (The answers to questions can often point to generalizations of a thematic nature.)
9. not a theme
10. theme

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Attachment C
Growing Up In Different Ages and Places

Introduction

You are about the begin a program of reading that features myths, fables, stories and poems that focus on plots, characters and thinking concerned with the issues of growing up. These pieces of literature come from around the world and were created at very different times. As you read you will begin to notice similarities of theme. You may even begin to see certain kinds of themes reappear in different works.

For each reading selection, you should write a paragraph that identifies the theme of the selection *and* present and explain at least three supporting details from the text. The explanation of the details should clearly demonstrate how they built the concept of the theme in the piece.

Your Reading Plan

You have already chosen the pieces that you are intending to read. The teacher has coordinated your groups, and you are ready to begin. Everyone will be following a similar arrangement of literature:

> 1st myths
> 2nd fables
> 3rd general fiction
> 4th poems.

If you desire to expand your reading program on an individual level, you may add one more selection to each category for independent reading upon the approval of the teacher.

Your reading groups will function somewhat independently. The groups may decide on their own format for reading the pieces (silent reading followed by shared oral reading for example). Likewise, you may choose your own discussion format. However, you must bear in mind that **the primary objective will always be the identification of theme(s) and the details of the text that develop it (them)**. The specific completion dates for each of your groups (myths, fables, general fiction and poems) will be announced after you have begun to work.

Since your final project will be independent, it is suggested that you keep your own notes (reading journal) regarding the discussions and your own thoughts during reading and after discussion.

To keep things running smoothly, each group will need to have a **team leader, a recorder, and a timekeeper/scheduler**.

**Attachment D
Your Individual Project**

There are two options available for your final assessment. Your final task will be to either write a paper comparing the similarities of theme in the works you have chosen or to create an original piece of writing of your own that reflects the concerns of what you have read.

I. A Comparison Paper

If you choose, upon the completion of your reading you may write a paper that reflects what you have discovered in your reading, reflection and discussion regarding similarities in the themes and symbols of the selections in your reading program.

For this option you will need to clearly identify each of your selections in a cover page that will include your name and class. In the body of the paper, it will then be necessary for you to develop a thesis statement that you have created. You should have this thesis statement approved by the teacher before you begin writing your paper. This will maximize success in further developing your ideas.

You paper must deal with all of the reading selections in your program with enough detail to clearly reflect your understanding of the themes and symbols of the pieces.

A sample of the rubric by which your paper will be scored will be made available to you.

II. A Creative Response Project

Another possibility is that you create some original work of your own that responds to what you have learned in your reading. This could be a poem, story, fable or an extension of some preexisting mythology. You might also create a film, slide show or other visual/physical representation of what you have read.

If you pursue this type of creative response, you must also write a brief reflection paper to accompany your work. This reflection should detail the specifics of your thought processes in creating the work and explain how the work relates to your reading. In all cases, it is important to particularly note the specific relationship(s) of your work thematically. In short, a reader/viewer/listener who reads your reflection should have a clear vision of your intent and its relationship to your studies in this lesson.

A sample of the rubric by which your creative project will be scored will be made available to you.

Attachment E
Rubric for Scoring Comparison and Contrast Essays

Name_____   Date_____

Superior

A superior essay has a clear and appropriate thesis. This thesis is developed with the use of specific and appropriate details from the readings. All of the works in the individual reading plan are adequately discussed in regard to the thesis. Reasoning is mature and comments are insightful as opposed to superficial. The sequencing and presentation of the paper is logical and evenly developed. The paper is mechanically and grammatically free of any fault that would impede communication. The word choices are mature and appropriate. The sentence structure is varied and appropriate to the subject(s) discussed.

Shows Promise

An essay shows promise that has a clear and appropriate thesis and attempts to develop these with specific and appropriate details from the readings. At this level the treatment of the individual works may be a bit uneven but is nonetheless insightful and tends to steer away from the superficial. The paper is mechanically and grammatically free of any fault that would impede communication. The word choices are generally mature and appropriate. The sentence structure is varied and appropriate to the subject(s) discussed.

Adequate

An adequate essay will have a clear and appropriate thesis and attempts to develop these with specific and appropriate details from the readings. While most of the works in the individual reading plan are dealt with, there are some significant gaps. The treatment of the individual works is uneven and some of the observations tend to be too superficial. The paper is mechanically and grammatically free of any fault that would seriously impede communication though some obvious errors remain. The word choices are generally mature and appropriate but could still be more focused and specific. The sentence structure is not always varied and not always appropriate to the subject(s) discussed.

Needs Work

An essay is considered to need work that has an inadequately developed thesis. The paper does not deal with several of the works from the individual reading plan, and the paper contains some mechanical and grammatical faults which seriously impede communication. Sentence structure tends to be simple and repetitive, and the vocabulary of the paper is not equal to the task or the grade level.

Unacceptable

A paper is considered unacceptable which
- has no clear thesis or
- does not develop the thesis or
- shows no evidence of a coherent and cohesive structure or
- has a large number of grammatical and/or mechanical faults which seriously impede communication or
- employs very immature language or
- employs language unacceptable in a school setting or
- has an insufficient amount of writing to adequately evaluate.

Rating: _____

Additional Comments: _____

_____

Attachment F

Rubric for Scoring Creative Response Projects

Name_____   Date_____

Superior
A superior project has a clear and appropriate theme. This theme is well developed and, when considered along with the reflection paper, demonstrates specific reference(s) and inspiration(s) from the readings. All of the works in the individual reading plan are coherently represented in the work. Reasoning is mature and comments are insightful as opposed to superficial. The work is mechanically (and grammatically) free of any fault that would impede communication. Artistic choices are mature and appropriate.

Shows Promise
A project shows promise that has a clear and appropriate theme and attempts to develop this theme, when considered along with the reflection paper, with specific reference(s) and inspiration(s) from the readings. At this level, the treatment of the individual works may be a bit uneven but is nonetheless insightful and tends to steer away from the superficial. The work is mechanically (and grammatically) free of any fault that would impede communication. Artistic choices are generally mature and appropriate.

Adequate
An adequate project has a clear and appropriate theme and attempts to develop this theme, when considered along with the reflection paper, with specific reference(s) and inspiration(s) from the readings. While most of the works in the individual reading plan are dealt with, there are some significant gaps. The treatment of the individual works is uneven and inspirations, artistic decisions, and/or reflections tend to be too superficial or immature. While the work is mechanically (and grammatically) free of any fault that would seriously impede communication, some obvious errors remain.

Needs Work
A project is considered to need work which has an inadequately developed theme. The work may not deal with several of the works from the individual reading plan, and has several mechanical and/or grammatical faults which seriously impede communication. The work seems superficial and/or immature and/or inappropriate to some degree.

Unacceptable
A project is considered unacceptable which
- has no clear theme or
- does not develop the theme or
- shows no evidence of inspiration or reference to the works from the individual reading plan or
- has a large number of grammatical and/or mechanical faults which seriously impede communication or
- employs very immature and/or inappropriate language and/or artistic decisions or
- employs language or other artistic depictions unacceptable in a school setting or
- is insufficiently complete to adequately evaluate.

Rating: _____

Additional Comments:
_____

_____