Reading Across Texts to Identify and Interpret Themes

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Family financial struggles
Started dancing at 13
Joined ABT at 18; watched coveted roles go to other dancers
Body; race
“I just said to them, 'What do I need to do? I am so eager. I am so hungry. I want to continue to push myself.'”
Received first title role: Firebird!
Six stress fractures
“I was on a path. I was going to become a principal dancer. I never let my mind rest. I kept dancing inside.”
“Generations of black women and men didn't have a fair chance in the ballet world; it's still difficult to be 'other.'"
Misty Copeland - Principal Ballerina, American Ballet Theatre

What can we learn from Misty’s story?
What themes emerge?
“Make discussions around theme commonplace in our classrooms; not just about the texts we read, but about the lives we lead.”
What is theme?

- Message (main, author’s)
- Moral
- Purpose
- Idea (main, big, central)
- Claim
- Topic
- Thesis
How do we *teach* theme?
How do we *deepen* students’ understanding of theme?
How do we *assess* students’ understanding of theme?
“Theme is a thread that runs throughout a text and evokes an emotional response within the reader.”

~ Cherry-Paul & Johansen, 2014
Teach students to:

1) Pay attention to details: characters, objects, colors

2) Note patterns: repeated images, phrases, emotions

3) Name the thread that ties everything together!
Quilt by Janet Wong

Our family is a quilt
of odd remnants patched together
in a strange pattern,
threads fraying, fabric wearing thin - -
but made to keep its warmth
even in bitter cold.
Identifying Themes Across Texts

Quilt by Janet Wong  The Giver by Lois Lowry

difference

sameness
Reading Across Texts

In The Giver by Lois Lowry, the community only wants sameness. They mostly look the same, they read the same books, and they have the same routines every day. They think that if everything is the same everyone will be happy and safe. The poem Quilt by Janet Wong has the opposite message. It is about how difference is good and important. She says that difference makes us strong.
## Pitfall #1 - Summarizing plot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Plot</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Lion King</td>
<td>After the king of the lion pride is killed, his young cub is led to believe that he is responsible for his father’s death. He runs away from the pride until one day he realizes that he must return.</td>
<td>The circle of life! There are a variety of experiences in life, both good and bad, that help shape us into the person we are meant to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding Nemo or Beauty and the Beast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pitfall #2 - Locking in on one event or moment

Text - Finding Nemo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Nemo becomes separated from his father, Marlin, and tries to find his way back to him.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Marlin meets Dory and they struggle through many experiences, like being trapped inside a whale, as they search for Nemo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td>Nemo escapes a fish tank, helps Dory escape a fish net, and is reunited with Marlin.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme - Determination is never giving up until you reach your goal.
**Theme Statement:** Acceptance is being open-minded and respecting others' differences, rather than being judgmental.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plot</th>
<th>Text Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning:</strong></td>
<td>“In spite of her hatred, Minna was afraid of the witch because she was a kind woman.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minna saw her cuts and bruises but still accepted her for who she is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle:</strong></td>
<td>Despite her fear of the broom, Minna saw her unique qualities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“At first Minna was frightened, but the broom segment harmed Minna.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End:</strong></td>
<td>After accepting the broom (Minna protected it).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                  | “She looked up and smiled at the broom, not a ghost at all, but still covered with the coat of white paint she’d given it.”
## Pitfall #3 - Limiting a text to just one theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events/Plot</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dory repeats important information (address) to remember</td>
<td>determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemo tries again and again to get out of the fish tank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin and Dory</td>
<td>friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin and the sea turtles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemo and the sea gulls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemo and the fish in the tank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemo and Marlin</td>
<td>family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea turtles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin surviving shark attack</td>
<td>bravery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin and Nemo leaving home and going beyond the sea anemone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Widow’s Broom by Chris Van Allsburg

Theme:
- Difference
- Acceptance
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Hatred

The Widow’s Broom
### Common Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Novice</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>friendship</td>
<td>growing up</td>
<td>overcoming obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kindness</td>
<td>responsibility</td>
<td>power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>determination</td>
<td>fairness/inequality</td>
<td>difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bravery</td>
<td>cooperation</td>
<td>oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family</td>
<td>greed</td>
<td>breaking/repeating cycles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference is having a unique perspective and way of viewing the world.
Crafting a Theme Statement Using “is”

A theme is universal.

Acceptance is:
- respecting others’ differences
- not being judgemental
- being open-minded to everyone

Acceptance is being open-minded and respecting others’ differences, rather than being judgemental.
Reading a Text Set

Ask students to annotate as they read and to note:

What stands out?

What questions are raised?

What does this text seem to really be about?

What ideas are you thinking about?

What are you left wondering about?

What might the author want readers to hold onto after reading this text?
Determining a theme

1) Pay attention to details:
   - characters
   - objects
   - colors

2) Note patterns such as repeated:
   - images
   - phrases
   - emotions

3) Name the threads that tie this all together.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Representation (I think...)</th>
<th>Text Evidence (Because...)</th>
<th>Analysis (This tells me...)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kiss</td>
<td>Softly</td>
<td>&quot;It felt like having air to breathe or a blanket to keep me warm – automatic – and I never gave it a second thought.&quot;</td>
<td>The kisses made Ralph feel secure and he felt they were necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absence of kiss</td>
<td>growing up</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Father might think Ralph is too old for such childish things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jellyfish</td>
<td>separation</td>
<td>&quot;What if they want to see their friends but they’re not lucky? I asked. He shrivelled. &quot;Then it seems they drift away from each other.&quot;</td>
<td>Distance and separation aren’t easy but are part of life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Growing up is hard because it means letting go of childish things.
Create a Theme Digital Bin
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Universal Idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>Friendship is appreciating and accepting one another for who they really are.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contact Information

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Book signing: Monday - 5PM to 6PM
Heinemann Booth #2, 5th floor Convention Center