

DETERMINE A THEME AND SUMMARIZE A STORY

RL.7.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

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DETERMINE A THEME AND SUMMARIZE A STORY

TEACHER NOTES

RL.7.2, Lessons 1–3

UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit examines how to determine a theme of a literary text by analyzing how a character responds to a challenge in the text. Students will trace how themes develop in short stories by examining characters and story events. Then they will extend their understanding by writing their own story based on a selected theme statement.

Lesson 1: In this lesson, students determine a theme of a literary text. First, you lead a discussion about theme and give students an example of a theme of a familiar story. Then students describe the main character, challenge, and character actions in a short story and use those elements to determine a theme of the story.

Lesson 2: In this lesson, students analyze how a theme develops in a short story. Students identify key words and details in a text and then use them to create a collage that represents a theme. This activity helps students understand how a text's events and details shape the theme.

Lesson 3: In this lesson, students write a short story based on a provided theme statement and then write a summary of a peer's story. First, students select a theme statement from a list and brainstorm plot elements that will develop the selected theme. Next, they write their story. Finally, students write a summary of a classmate's story.

Research Findings	Lesson Strategies, Approaches, or Activities
<p>“Helping students understand how a character responds to a challenge enhances their ability to identify the theme of a text as well as to appreciate what stories teach us about ourselves.”</p> <p>(Sisson & Sisson, 2014, p. 20)</p>	<p>In Lessons 1 and 2, students identify how a main character responds to a challenge and the life lesson the character learns. In Lesson 3, students write a story that tells how a character acts in response to a story problem.</p>
<p>Research demonstrates that training students to identify story details that support a theme and to visually represent the ways an author connects ideas has positive outcomes in having a deeper comprehension of the text.</p> <p>(Pearson & Fielding, 1996)</p>	<p>In each lesson, students use a graphic organizer to visually represent the details an author uses to create a theme.</p>

<p>“In discovering themes, morals and lessons learned, students make logical inferences about character’s actions and traits and cite textual evidence to support the inferences they make.” (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2014, p.50)</p>	<p>In Lesson 2, students use words and images from the story to make a collage that represents a story theme.</p>
<p>“Helping students articulate theme occurs when students can see how a moral reflects the trajectory of the story or how the theme reflects what the character learns about the particular foible.” (Smith & Wilhelm, 2010, p. 170)</p>	<p>In each lesson, students articulate a theme of a literary text by writing a theme statement. In Lesson 3, students create a story based on a provided theme statement, creating a character and situation in which that character must face a problem to learn the theme’s lesson.</p>

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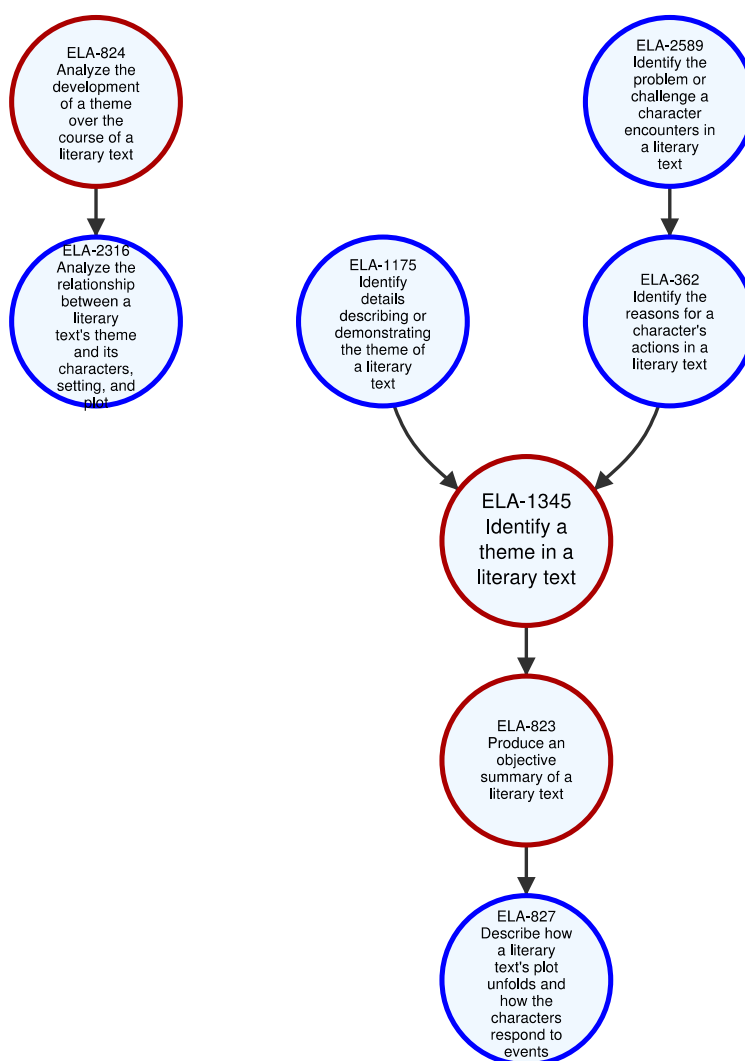
DETERMINE A THEME AND SUMMARIZE A STORY

LEARNING MAP TOOL

RL.7.2

STANDARD

RL.7.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.



**Learning map model for RL.7.2.*

Node ID	Node Name	Node Description
ELA-362	IDENTIFY THE REASONS FOR A CHARACTER'S ACTIONS IN A LITERARY TEXT	Identify reasons for a character's actions in the events of a literary text.
ELA-823	PRODUCE AN OBJECTIVE SUMMARY OF A LITERARY TEXT	Produce a summary of a story, drama, or poem that is free of personal feelings or opinions.
ELA-824	ANALYZE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A THEME OVER THE COURSE OF A LITERARY TEXT	Analyze the development of a theme in a story, drama, or poem over the course of the text.
ELA-827	DESCRIBE HOW A LITERARY TEXT'S PLOT UNFOLDS AND HOW THE CHARACTERS RESPOND TO EVENTS	Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
ELA-1175	IDENTIFY DETAILS DESCRIBING OR DEMONSTRATING THE THEME OF A LITERARY TEXT	Identify the words, phrases, and other details that describe or demonstrate the theme of a literary text.
ELA-1345	IDENTIFY A THEME IN A LITERARY TEXT	Identify the theme of a story, drama, or poem. The theme should be a word or concise phrase about the larger truth of the text.
ELA-2316	ANALYZE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A LITERARY TEXT'S THEME AND ITS CHARACTERS, SETTING, AND PLOT	Analyze the development of a theme in a story, drama, or poem over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot.
ELA-2589	IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM OR CHALLENGE A CHARACTER ENCOUNTERS IN A LITERARY TEXT	Identify what hinders or prevents the character from reaching his or her goal in a story or drama.

IDENTIFYING THEME

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

RL.7.2, Lesson 1

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students identify a theme in a literary text by examining how a character responds to a challenge.

STANDARD

RL.7.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

PREPARATION

Before the lesson, select a familiar literary text from a curriculum resource that has been purchased for individual student use, such as a class set of textbooks. Follow all copyright restrictions and guidelines as they pertain to material you select for classroom use.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ whiteboard, chart paper, or document camera
 - ▶ literary text for individual student use
 - ▶ **STUDENT HANDOUT: IDENTIFYING THEME**
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IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: “I can identify how a character responds to a challenge and how their response helps create a theme in a story.”

Tell students that today’s lesson is on theme and summarization.

Direct students to talk to a neighbor about their favorite movie as a child, reviewing who the major character is and what they learn at the end of the film. **Set** a timer for five minutes, and then ask for volunteers to restate what they discussed. As each student retells the details of the film, make a list of the events on the board or document camera. **Tell** students that by retelling the details, they are giving a summary.

Next, **ask** for volunteers to write definitions of *theme* on the board. **Tell** students that a theme is different from the topic of the text, such as love or family or friendship. A theme is what the character learns as they respond to the challenges in the story. A theme is an idea that relates to people's lives in and out of the story.

Give an example of a theme using a familiar story: In the movie *Frozen*, Elsa must come to accept her power with the help of her sister. The story is about sisters and love (the topics); a theme is that everyone needs support from family to accept their challenges and become their best selves. A theme can be stated in many different ways, but it is always based on the characters and actions in the story. A theme is supported by evidence from the text, such as what the character says and what the character does. For example, when Elsa sings "Let It Go," she is learning to accept herself and the power she has, and she knows she cannot hold it back anymore. **Explain** that to determine a theme, you need to pay attention to how the character develops over the course of the story, from the beginning to the end.

Tell students that they will read a familiar literary text and will identify a theme based on how the character responds to the challenges in the text.

Ask for volunteers to share a definition of *summary*. **Tell** students that a summary is a retelling of the important facts and details in the text. A summary uses complete sentences and does not contain any opinions.

Pass out **STUDENT HANDOUT: IDENTIFYING THEME** and review the directions. Remind students that they will not all come up with the same theme, and that is ok as long as the theme statements are based on text evidence. Students may work with a partner to complete the handout.

As students work, **circulate** and ask the Checking for Understanding questions.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING		
<p>Determine if the student can IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM OR CHALLENGE A CHARACTER ENCOUNTERS IN A LITERARY TEXT (ELA-2589):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What challenge does the main character face? ▶ What prevents the character from getting what they want? 	<p>Determine if the student can IDENTIFY THE REASONS FOR A CHARACTER'S ACTIONS IN A LITERARY TEXT (ELA-362):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What actions does the character take to respond to the challenge? ▶ Why does the character _____? 	<p>Determine if the student can IDENTIFY A THEME IN A LITERARY TEXT (ELA-1345):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What does the character's response to the challenge teach you about life? ▶ What does the character learn?

Direct students to tell a neighbor their theme statement. **Ask** volunteers to share with the class. **Collect** handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the [TEACHER NOTES](#) for this lesson set.

IDENTIFYING THEME

STUDENT HANDOUT

Lesson 1

Directions: Use complete sentences to summarize the story elements.

Character Description

Character Actions

Challenge(s)

Theme

+

=

Character Responses to
the Challenge(s)

ANALYZING THEME

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

RL.7.2, Lesson 2

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students analyze the development of a theme in a literary text by using text details to create a collage that represents the theme.

STANDARD

RL.7.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

PREPARATION

Before the lesson, select a short story from a curriculum resource that has been purchased for individual student use, such as a class set of textbooks. Follow all copyright restrictions and guidelines as they pertain to material you select for classroom use.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ whiteboard or chart paper
- ▶ short story for individual student use
- ▶ sticky notes or highlighters
- ▶ notebook paper
- ▶ [STUDENT HANDOUT: THEME COLLAGE](#)
- ▶ collage materials, such as colored pencils, magazines, scissors, and glue

IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: “I can trace how a theme of a short story develops by identifying words and images in the text that represent the theme.

Review the definition of *theme* by asking a volunteer to share. Responses may include the equation from the previous lesson (challenge + response = theme) or that a theme is a lesson the character learns that relates to life in general. **Write** definitions on the board.

Review the themes that students described on the previous lesson’s handout.

Tell students that in today’s lesson they will read a short story and create a collage of words, phrases, and images that show a theme of the text. Remind students that they may identify the theme a little differently than others, based on the words and images in the text that they determine to be most important.

Tell students that you will read the text aloud, and they will mark words that they feel are important to the story. Students may place a sticky note in the margin next to the section or highlight on copies. Remind students to pay attention to how the character develops over the course of the text, from the beginning to the end. **Read** the text, pausing briefly between paragraphs to give students time to annotate.

Next, **direct** students to take out a blank sheet of paper and write a description of the challenge the character faces and how they respond. Give students five minutes to write.

Ask students to think of a word that covers the topic of the text, for example, love, friendship, or family. Call on volunteers to share what they think the topic is. **Write** responses on the board and then conduct a class vote to decide which topic word is the best choice.

Tell students that a collage is a group of words and images that represent an idea. **Pass out** **STUDENT HANDOUT: THEME COLLAGE**, and **tell** students that they will use the details they marked in the text to create a collage that represents a theme of the story with both words and pictures. You may have students write and draw to create the collage or they may cut out words and images from magazines or create a digital collage from online content. Consider locating or creating a model collage about a familiar story for reference. **Direct** students to write a theme statement at the bottom of the handout when they finish their collage.

While students work, **walk around** and check understanding.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Determine if the student can **ANALYZE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A THEME OVER THE COURSE OF A LITERARY TEXT (ELA-824)**:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ What happens at the beginning of the story?▶ What challenge is the main character faced with? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ How does the character respond to the challenge over the course of the story? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ What does the character learn by the end of the story?▶ How does the lesson apply to everyone or life in general?▶ What is your theme statement? What text details helped you write the statement? |
|--|---|--|

Ask for volunteers to share their collages with the class, or hang up the collages and do a gallery walk.

Collect challenge descriptions and handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the [TEACHER NOTES](#) for this lesson set.

THEME COLLAGE

STUDENT HANDOUT

Lesson 2

A large, empty rectangular box with a blue border, intended for students to create a theme collage.

Theme Statement

DEVELOPING THEME AND SUMMARIZING PLOT IN ORIGINAL STORIES

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

RL.7.2, Lesson 3

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students create a short story based on a general theme statement and then summarize a partner's story.

STANDARD

RL.7.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

PREPARATION

Before the lesson, create five generic theme statements or select them from the list below.

- ▶ Crime doesn't pay.
 - ▶ Hard work will overcome odds.
 - ▶ You are your own worst enemy.
 - ▶ Growing up is hard to do.
 - ▶ Sacrifices bring rewards.
 - ▶ Family is most important in life.
 - ▶ People can [or cannot] overcome nature.
 - ▶ There is bad and good in every situation.
 - ▶ People are more alike than different.
-

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ [STUDENT HANDOUT: STORY BRAINSTORM](#)
 - ▶ notebook paper
 - ▶ [STUDENT HANDOUT: STORY SUMMARY](#)
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IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: “I can create a story using a general theme, and I can summarize the events and actions in a classmate’s story.”

Call on volunteers to explain how a story’s theme is different from its topic. **Remind** the class that a topic is a one-word idea, such as love or family, while a theme is a lesson a character learns that applies generally to life. **Review** some of the themes from the previous lessons by inviting a few students to share a theme they identified.

Tell students that today they will write a story based on a theme statement they will choose from a list. They will create a character who has a challenge and will write how the character responds to the challenge and learns the lesson of the theme statement. Then they will exchange stories with a neighbor and summarize the events of their partner’s story and identify its theme.

Display the list of theme statements, and **direct** students to select one of the themes. **Pass out** [STUDENT HANDOUT: STORY BRAINSTORM](#).

Explain that in the beginning of a story, a character acts one way, but because of the challenge or problem they face, the character develops and changes by the end of the story. Tell students that the plot mountain will help them create a story that shows how the character develops from the beginning of the story to the end of the story.

Release students to work and ask the Checking for Understanding questions as you circulate. If students have difficulty writing a story based on a theme, they may select a different one.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING	
<p>Determine if the student can DESCRIBE HOW A LITERARY TEXT’S PLOT UNFOLDS AND HOW THE CHARACTERS RESPOND TO IT (ELA-827):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ What problem does the character face?▶ How do they respond to it?▶ What actions do they take?	<p>Determine if the student can ANALYZE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A LITERARY TEXT’S THEME AND ITS CHARACTERS, SETTING, AND PLOT (ELA-2316):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ How does the character learn the theme you selected?

Provide time for students to write their stories on notebook paper.

When students have written a story draft, **direct** them to exchange their stories with a partner. **Pass out** [STUDENT HANDOUT: STORY SUMMARY](#) and instruct students to identify the plot elements and theme of their partner’s story and then write a summary of the story. Direct students to share their summaries with their partner when they have finished.

As students work, **walk around** and collect evidence of student thinking.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Determine if the student can **PRODUCE AN OBJECTIVE SUMMARY OF A LITERARY TEXT (ELA-823)**:

- ▶ What happens in the story?
- ▶ What challenge or problem does the character face?
- ▶ How does the character respond?
- ▶ What is the lesson or theme?

Collect stories and handouts.

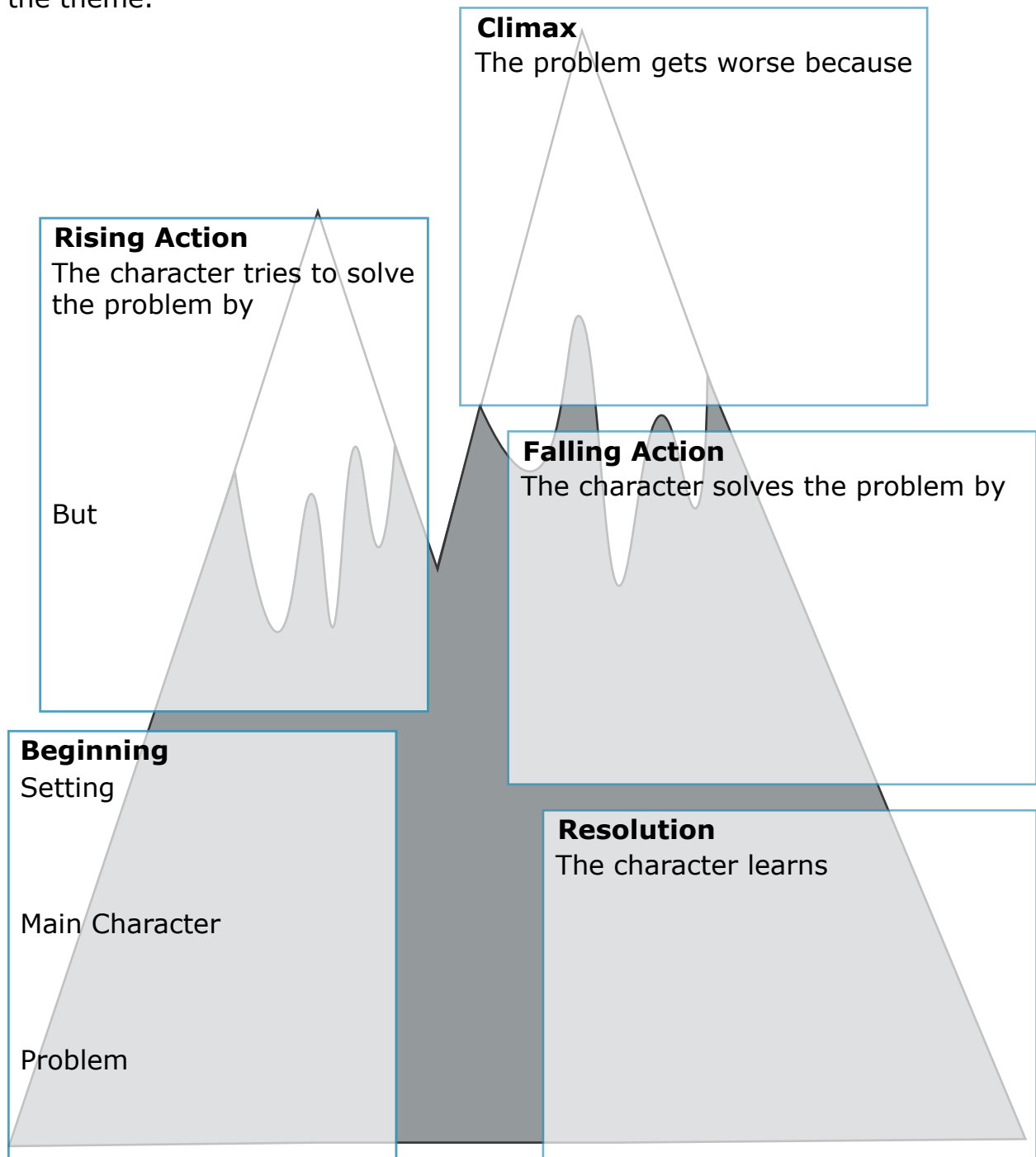
For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the [TEACHER NOTES](#) for this lesson set.

STORY BRAINSTORM

STUDENT HANDOUT

Lesson 3

Directions: Use the plot mountain to brainstorm how your story will develop the theme.



STORY SUMMARY

STUDENT HANDOUT

Lesson 3

Directions: Record the elements of your partner's story and then use them to write a summary.

Character Description		Summary
Challenge(s)	Character Responses	
Theme		

DETERMINE A THEME AND SUMMARIZE A STORY

STUDENT FEEDBACK GUIDE

RL.7.2, Lesson 1–3

Directions: For each learning goal, circle the sentence that best matches what you can do.

Learning Goal	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Identify the plot elements that support a theme in a literary text.	I can identify the problem or challenge in the story.	I can identify the problem or challenge in the story and how the character responds to it.	I can explain the life lesson the character learns by responding to the challenge.
Cite textual evidence that supports a theme in a literary text.	I can find a word or phrase in the text that supports the theme.	I can find two words or phrases in the text and explain how they relate to the theme.	I can use supporting details from the text to describe a theme of the story.
Summarize a literary text.	I can describe the main character and main events in the story.	I can describe the main character, main events, and the lesson the character learns in the story.	I can write a summary of the story that includes the main character, main events, character actions, and how the character learns the lesson of the theme.