THEMES & CENTRAL IDEAS IN FICTION

Learning Targets:
I can determine a theme or a central idea of a text.

I can analyze how a theme or a central idea of a text is developed over the course of the text, including its relationship to characters, setting, and plot.
CENTRAL IDEA VS THEME

- Literature is never written simply to tell an entertaining story. Yes, the writer hopes you will enjoy it, but the writer’s purpose is much deeper than mere entertainment.

- When writing literature, the writer structures the story with the purpose of exploring and making a statement about the human condition.

- This means the writer is communicating to you, the reader, a statement about what it really means to be a human being and live in human societies--the good aspects and the bad.

- When exploring the human condition, writers focus on universal concepts that everyone in the world can relate to, no matter their status, age, location or time period.
CENTRAL IDEA VS THEME

These universal concepts are referred to as the **central idea** and the **theme** of the story/novel.

The central idea of a fiction text is different from the central idea of an informational text.

In fiction text, **the central idea shows the aspect of the human condition the writer has chosen to focus on in the story** (such as love, overcoming obstacles, friendship, greed, revenge, etc). A central idea is written in **one word or a short phrase (not a sentence)**.

The **theme shows what the writer has concluded about the way the central idea is reflected in every day life** (i.e. Determination helps one overcome obstacles in life. OR Friendship sustains humans through life’s experiences.). A **theme is written in one complete sentence. IT IS NOT THE MORAL OF THE STORY.**
Central Ideas often focus on the emotions, character traits, and experiences, and conflicts that all people deal with at some point in their lives.

Look at your handout for Common Central Ideas & Themes. You probably used this last year; it still applies this year because the human condition never changes.

Take 30 seconds to highlight 5 different emotions you see in that list. Partner Share; Whole Group Share.

Take 30 seconds to highlight (in another color) experiences and/or conflicts in that list. Partner Share; Whole Group Share.

Take 30 seconds to highlight (in another color) character/personality traits. Partner Share; Whole Group Share.
Themes make a larger statement about the central idea; this statement also applies to all societies as a whole.

Look at your handout for Common Central Ideas & Themes.

Draw an arrow from 5 central ideas to the themes that give a statement about that central idea. You may be able to use some of the central ideas you identified previously. However, there aren’t enough themes to correspond to every central idea on the list.

Partner Share. Whole Group Share.
HOW TO DETERMINE THE CENTRAL IDEA

Look at the characters and their actions.

What are their personality and character traits? Which of their traits cause them conflict?

What motivates characters to behave as they do? How do the characters respond to the conflict?

What part of the characters’ experiences, actions, or lives are universal things that can affect all people all over the world? Eliminate everything that isn’t universal.
Look at “Nightmare in Yellow.” Let’s answer the questions:

What are the protagonist’s personality and character traits? Which of his traits cause him conflict?

What motivates the protagonist to behave as he does? How does the protagonist respond to the conflict?

What part of the protagonist’s experiences, actions, or life can we eliminate for NOT being universal?

What part of the characters’ experiences, actions, or lives are universal things that can affect all people all over the world?
HOW TO DETERMINE THE CENTRAL IDEA

Central Ideas found in “Nightmare in Yellow.” Let’s discuss how we see each of these in the story.

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<th>Greed</th>
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<th>Planning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Arrogance/Conceit/Overconfidence</td>
<td>Appearances vs Reality</td>
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HOW TO DETERMINE THE THEME

Find the central idea first, if you haven’t already.

Determine what the author’s opinion, perspective, or belief is about this central idea. You have to infer this from your understanding of the story. Often, the theme isn’t revealed until the end of the story because the RESOLUTION of the conflict helps to reveal the theme.

Turn that opinion, perspective, or belief of the author into a THEME STATEMENT that shows how the central idea operates in people’s lives. Remember that the theme should be one sentence and be worded so that is universal.
**HOW TO DETERMINE THE THEME**

- Let’s write theme statements for each of the central ideas we discussed for “Nightmare in Yellow.”

- Each row will be assigned a different central idea. For that central idea, write a theme statement that reflects the author’s opinion of how this central idea operates in people’s lives.

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<thead>
<tr>
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Wednesday, October 23, 13
CENTRAL IDEA & THEME PRACTICE

You will form small groups. You will need a blank sheet of paper.

Each group will have a different set of brief stories. Read each story independently and find the central idea and theme of each one. Label your paper with the station number, the title of the text, CI for Central Idea and T for Theme. DO NOT USE YOUR HANDOUT!

Label the Central Idea of the story as :CI.”

Below the CI, write a THEME statement (labeled as “T”) for that CI.

You will have 7 minutes for each one. After the 7 minutes, you will discuss in your groups. Then we will rotate stations.

Remember that I will use these responses to determine your level of understanding about today’s lesson. Please make your answers as specific as possible.