

# Finding the Theme

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## Finding the Theme

### What is theme?

Can you remember a favorite story from childhood?  
What was it about?



Do you also remember a message you learned from the story?



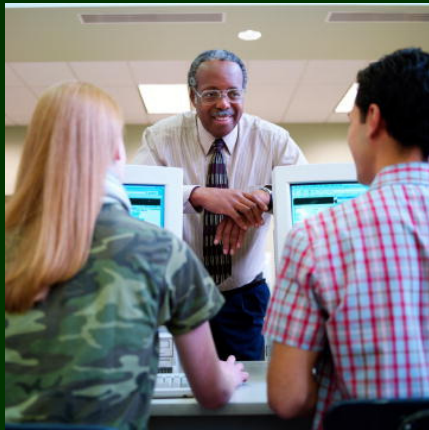
The message you learned is the story's **theme**.



# Finding the Theme

## What is theme?

**Theme** is what a story tells us about our lives.  
**Theme** is a truth about people, society, or the human condition. ▼



With age comes wisdom. ▼



Different cultures are not so different after all. ▼



Doing the right thing isn't always easy.



# Finding the Theme

## What is theme?

A teacher asked three students to state the **theme** of the story "The Three Little Pigs." ▾



One student  
said 



Another said 



The third student  
said 

Which response explains the theme?

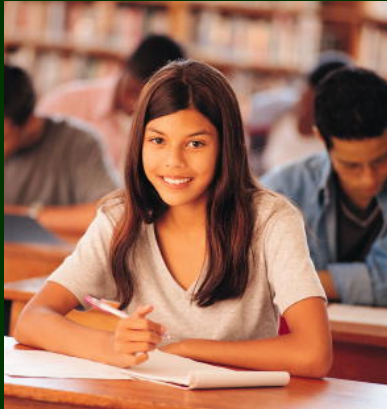
Answer



# Finding the Theme

## What is theme?

A teacher asked three students to state the **theme** of the story "The Three Little Pigs."



The first student discusses the characters.



The second discusses the plot.



The third student discusses the **theme**.



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## Finding the Theme

### What is theme?

Because writers rarely state a **theme** directly, you must look for clues. ▼

- Think about the significance of the title.

In Pam Muñoz Ryan's book *Esperanza Rising*, the title gives a clue that Esperanza will rise above something. If you know Spanish, you know that the name *Esperanza* means "hope." Maybe the theme will have something to do with hope.



## Finding the Theme

### What is theme?

- Look for broad statements about life made by the narrator.

The narrator says, "Miguel had been right about never giving up, and she [Esperanza] had been right, too, about rising above those who held them down."

- Think about how the characters change or what they learn.

Tragedy changes Esperanza's life of luxury to one of uncertainty and hard work. Although it is difficult, Esperanza is able to rise above her circumstances.

[End of Section]



# Finding the Theme

## Why find the theme?

Finding the **theme** helps you

- get a deeper understanding of the story you're reading. ▼
- connect the story to your life. ▼



Finding the **theme** is particularly useful for short stories and narrative poems in which the main character faces difficult situations.

[End of Section]



## Finding the Theme

### Tips

Start by identifying the subject or the characters.

Answer

Summarize the plot.

Answer

A dog carrying a bone in his mouth was heading for home. As he crossed a bridge, he looked at his reflection in the water. There he saw a dog holding a bone! He wanted that dog's bone, so he growled. The dog in the reflection growled back. Then the dog shook his head, and the dog in the water shook his head in response. Finally the dog on the bridge jumped into the water, barking at the reflection in the water. When he came up, his bone was gone, and so was the dog in the water.



## Finding the Theme

### Tips

Start by identifying the subject or the characters.

a dog carrying a bone in his mouth

A dog carrying a bone in his mouth was heading for home. As he crossed a bridge, he looked at his reflection in the water. There he saw a dog holding a bone! He wanted that dog's bone, so he growled. The dog in the reflection growled back. Then the dog shook his head, and the dog in the water shook his head in response. Finally the dog on the bridge jumped into the water, barking at the reflection in the water. When he came up, his bone was gone, and so was the dog in the water.

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## Finding the Theme

### Tips

Summarize the plot.

A dog on a bridge sees another dog with a bone. He wants the other dog's bone. He doesn't realize that the other dog is only a reflection. He tries to get the bone by jumping into the water but only manages to lose his bone.

A dog carrying a bone in his mouth was heading for home. As he crossed a bridge, he looked at his reflection in the water. There he saw a dog holding a bone! He wanted that dog's bone, so he jumped into the water. The dog in the reflection came back. Then the dog shook his head and the dog in the water shook its head in response. Finally the dog on the bridge jumped into the water, but when he came up, his bone was gone, as the dog in the water.

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## Finding the Theme

### Tips

Identify clues to the theme in what the character learns.

Answer

In a complete sentence, state the theme.

Answer

A dog carrying a bone in his mouth was heading for home. As he crossed a bridge, he looked at his reflection in the water. There he saw a dog holding a bone! He wanted that dog's bone, so he growled. The dog in the reflection growled back. Then the dog shook his head, and the dog in the water shook his head in response. Finally the dog on the bridge jumped into the water, barking at the reflection in the water. When he came up, his bone was gone, and so was the dog in the water.

[End of Section]



## Finding the Theme

### Tips

Identify clues to the theme in what the character learns.

The boldface words are clues to the theme.

A dog carrying a bone in his mouth was heading for home. As he crossed a bridge, he looked at his reflection in the water. There he saw a dog holding a bone! **He wanted that dog's bone**, so he growled. The dog in the reflection growled back. Then the dog shook his head, and the dog in the water shook his head in response. Finally the dog on the bridge jumped into the water, barking at the reflection in the water. When he came up, **his bone was gone**, and so was the dog in the water.

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## Finding the Theme

### Tips

In a complete sentence, state the theme.

Greed causes problems and may leave us with less than we originally had.

A dog carrying a bone in his mouth was heading for home. As he crossed a bridge, he looked at his reflection in the water. There he saw a dog holding a bone! He wanted that dog's bone, so he growled. The dog in the reflection growled back. Then the dog shook his head, and the dog in the water shook his head in response. Finally the dog on the bridge jumped into the water, barking at the reflection in the water. When he came up, his bone was gone, and so was the dog in the water.

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## Finding the Theme

### Use the Strategy

As you read “Two Frogs and the Milk Vat,” stop at each open-book sign  and think about what you have just read. ▾



Stop  
and  
think.



Answer  
the  
question. ▾

These questions will show you how to find the theme.

[End of Section]



# Finding the Theme

## Practice the Strategy

Remember these hints when identifying and analyzing a story's theme.

- Don't try to state the theme in one word; use a complete sentence instead.
- If you find yourself telling what *happened* in the story, you have confused theme with plot.
- The theme should tell a truth about *life*, not just about the story.



## Finding the Theme

### PRACTICE

Answer these questions about “Two Frogs and the Milk Vat.”

1. Where is the story set?
2. What problem do the frogs face?
3. Why do you think one frog keeps swimming while the other gives up?
4. What did you learn about humans and human nature that’s worth remembering?

[End of Section]



# Finding the Theme

The End

