

Growing Themes

Theme

K20 Center, Melissa Rule Wicker, Gage Jeter
Published by *K20 Center*

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 License

Grade Level	8th – 9th Grade	**Time Frame**	1-3 class period(s)
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	90 minutes
Course	American Literature, British Literature, World Literature		

Essential Question

What universal themes are found within and across various genres?

Summary

In this lesson, students learn to effectively identify and analyze themes in both fiction and nonfiction texts. Students evaluate universal theme sets then find examples of these themes in articles and passages from literature. Finally, students demonstrate their understanding of theme statements by creating their own theme statement that can be applied to both fiction and nonfiction texts.

Snapshot

Engage

Students assess dichotomous theme statements in a Walking Vote activity.

Explore

Students create theme statements related to two pairs of theme words.

Explain

Students use Why-Lighting to identify examples of theme words in *The Outsiders*.

Extend

Students identify themes in nonfiction articles and compare the themes to those found in *The Outsiders*.

Evaluate

Students reflect on themes found in *The Outsiders* and the nonfiction article and create a theme statement applicable to both texts.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Reading (6-12)

IDT402: Identify a clear central idea or theme in somewhat challenging passages or their paragraphs
SYN301: Make straightforward comparisons between two passages

Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts (Grade 8)

8.3.R.3: Students will analyze how authors use key literary elements to contribute to the meaning of a text:

- setting
- plot
- characters (i.e., protagonist, antagonist)
- characterization
- theme
- conflict (i.e., internal and external)

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 8)

8.3.R.3: Analyze literary elements to support interpretations of a literary text:

- setting
- plot
- characters (i.e., protagonist, antagonist)
- characterization
- conflict (i.e., internal, external)
- point of view (i.e., third person limited and omniscient, second person, and unreliable narrator)

8.3.R.8: Compare or contrast two or more texts, providing textual evidence to support their inferences.

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 8)

9.3.R.3: Evaluate how literary elements impact theme, mood, and/or tone, using textual evidence:

- setting
- plot structure (e.g., foreshadowing, flashback, *in media res*)
- conflict (i.e., internal, external)
- characters (e.g., protagonist, antagonist)
- characterization (i.e., direct, indirect)
- point of view (e.g., narrator reliability)
- archetypes

9.3.R.7: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics, using textual evidence to support their claims and inferences.

Attachments

- Crafting a Theme Statement—Growing Themes.docx
- Crafting a Theme Statement—Growing Themes.pdf
- Lesson Slides—Growing Themes.pptx
- The Outsiders Passages—Growing Themes.docx
- The Outsiders Passages—Growing Themes.pdf
- Theme Flowers Blank Petals—Growing Themes.docx
- Theme Flowers Blank Petals—Growing Themes.pdf
- Theme Flowers Guide—Growing Themes.docx
- Theme Flowers Guide—Growing Themes.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Theme Flowers Guide document (attached; one per teacher)
- Theme Flowers Blank Petals handout (attached; one per student)
- The Outsiders Passages handout (attached; one per student)

- Crafting a Theme Statement handout (attached; one per student)
- News articles (linked in the Engage section; print or give students digital access)
- Highlighters (sets of four different colors; one set per student)
- Writing utensils and paper

15 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Content Warning

The first passage from *The Outsiders* contains a scene of a character being pursued and shot by police. It may be distressing or triggering for some students.

Teacher's Note: Lesson Preparation

Prior to the lesson, choose several news or nonfiction articles that reflect the themes presented during the Extend phase. Print enough copies of each article so that students can individually read an article then form a group with three to four other students that read the same article.

Below are some recommended articles appropriate for an 8th grade classroom that reflect themes discussed in the lesson.

- "How I Found True Love in an Arranged Marriage" (Love/Hate)
- "Courage in Denmark: Resistance to the Nazis in WWII" (Courage/Fear, Love/Hate)
- "Going to School as a Refugee" (Acceptance/Isolation)
- "Fear Prompts Teens to Act Impulsively" (Courage/Fear)
- "Dedicated to the Goal" (Loyalty/Betrayal)

You may access these articles digitally without an account. To print the articles, visit CommonLit.org and log in or sign up for a free account. Return to this less and select the link of the article you would like to print. Select "Download PDF" and follow the directions to print the article.

For students whose first language is not English, CommonLit.org provides translations of the digital versions of the articles. Students must click "Translate" about the "Activities" box and select their preferred language. After selecting a language, a globe will appear to the left of each paragraph. Students may click on the link to see a translation of each paragraph in a pop-up window.

Display **slides 2-4** and introduce the title, essential question, and objectives of the lesson.

Display **slide 5** and introduce the Walking Vote activity. Tell students that they will be introduced to a series of statements. Tell students that they must decide whether each statement represents courage, fear, or both. They will then walk to one side of the room to illustrate what they believe the statement represents. Notify students that each slide will have arrows that direct them where to move based on what they think of the statement.

Teacher's Note: Activity Facilitation

If space allows, consider instructing students to move back to the middle of the room before you read each new quote. This process may discourage students from choosing to stay in one part of the room for the whole activity instead of assessing each statement individually.

Display **slide 6** and read aloud the quote “A spark can start a great fire” by Emmet Fox. Direct students to walk to one side if they believe the quote symbolizes courage, or the other side of the room if they believe it represents fear. If students believe the quote symbolizes both, tell them to stand in the middle of the room.

Once students have all moved to their chosen part of the room, ask them to discuss the reasoning for their choice with those around them. Invite each cluster of students to share out why they believe the quote symbolizes courage, fear, or both. Repeat this process for **slides 7–11**, which contain the following quotes:

- "Fear makes the wolf bigger than he is."—German Proverb **(slide 7)**
- "If you are afraid of something, you give it power over you."—Unknown **(slide 8)**
- "It is easy to be brave from a distance."—Aesop **(slide 9)**
- "A bully is always a coward."—Unknown **(slide 10)**
- "Courage is not the absence of fear, it is the conquest of it."—William Danforth **(slide 11)**

Once all quotes have been discussed, display **slide 12**. Initiate another round of the game and tell students that most of the rules will remain the same. Tell them that now they must decide whether each quote represents acceptance, isolation, or a combination of both. Read aloud the following quotes and direct students to move to the area of the room that aligns with their perspective of each quote.

- “Tolerance is giving to every other human being, every right which you claim for yourself.”—Ingersoll **(slide 13)**
- “People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.”—Unknown **(slide 14)**
- "Happiness can exists only in acceptance."—George Orwell **(slide 15)**
- "A man is known by the company he keeps."—Aesop **(slide 16)**
- "The worst loneliness is not being comfortable with yourself."—Mark Twain **(slide 17)**
- "No man is an island."—John Donne **(slide 18)**

20 minutes

Explore

Teacher's Note: Preparation

For this phase of the lesson, consider printing the **Theme Flowers Guide** document to guide students in completing the activity or to assess student work.

Have students return to their seats. Pass out one copy of the **Theme Flowers Blank Petals** handout to each student. Display **slide 19** and introduce two theme statements, one that represents love, and another that represents hate. Invite students to share out any statements or quotes they can think of that represent love or hate.

Draw students' attention to the flower labeled "Love & Hate" on their handouts. Instruct students to create three additional theme statements that represent love and three more that represent hate. Ask them to write one theme statement in each petal to fill out the flower. Tell students that they may create their own statements, use familiar quotes, or write down a theme from a popular story.

Example Love and Hate Theme Statements

Student responses may vary, but the Theme Flowers Guide document contains the following examples:

- "Hatred is blind, as well as love."—Oscar Wilde
- "Love is the absence of judgment."—Dalai Lama
- "Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light."—Helen Keller
- "Where there is great love, there are always miracles."—Willa Cather
- "Anger and hatred hinder good counsel."
- "In time, we hate that which we often fear."—William Shakespeare

Teacher's Note: Support and Modifications

Some students may write original theme statements, but others may need to research common themes or quotes to help them with the creative process. Advise them that they may fill in a few petals of their flowers with famous quotes or common sayings, then recommend that they use those quotes to create their own statements.

Consider permitting students to work in groups or independently. If some students need a challenge, have them create two statements for each of the words in the center of the flower along with two statements that could fit both words. For example, the quote, "The strength of a family, like the strength of an army, lies in its loyalty to each other," by Mario Puzo could reflect loyalty or betrayal.

Display **slide 20** and share the two example theme statements that represent loyalty and betrayal. Invite students to share out any example quotes or statements. Draw students' attention to the flower on their handouts labeled "Loyalty & Betrayal." Instruct students to create three theme statements that represent loyalty and three more that represent betrayal, similar to the statements on love and hate. Remind students that they may create their own statements, use familiar quotes, or write down a theme from a popular story.

Example Loyalty and Betrayal Theme Statements

- "You don't earn loyalty in a day. You earn it day-by-day."—Jeffrey Gitomer
- "Trust can take years to build, but only a second to break."
- "It is easier to forgive an enemy than to forgive a friend."—William Blake
- "The strength of a family, like the strength of an army, lies in its loyalty to each other."—Mario Puzo
- "Loyalty is what we seek in friendship."—Cicero
- "Lack of loyalty is one of the major causes of failure in every walk of life."—Napoleon Hill

Once students have finished their statements, invite four to five volunteers to share their responses with the class.

20 minutes

Explain

Teacher's Note: Materials

Students need four different colors of highlighters for this phase of the lesson. Slide 21 offers color suggestions, but you may change these colors based on your available supplies. You may also have students underline passages using colored pencils, markers, or crayons, based on what you have available.

If possible, avoid using both red and green for this activity to ensure accessibility for students with colorblindness.

Display **slide 21** and give each student a copy of **The Outsiders Passages** handout. Introduce the Why-Lighting strategy and explain to students that they will highlight different types of themes using different colors.

Explain to students that they should look for examples of the theme words within the passage. These examples could be a part of the plot or the setting, or they could be something the characters do, say, or think.

Teacher's Note: Facilitation

It may be helpful to model the activity before students engage independently. Choose one or two examples from the passage and explain why you chose these statements and which theme word they represent. Invite students to share out any examples from the passage as well, and have them explain why they chose that example and which theme word the example represents.

Allow students time to annotate the passage.

Display **slide 22** and tell students to review their annotations. Explain that now they must invent a theme statement that represents the overall theme of the passage. Tell them that they should form their themes around the theme word that they saw used most often. Encourage them to re-read the phrases they highlighted in that theme's color to help them create their theme statements.

20 minutes

Extend

Display **slide 23**. Explain to students that a theme can be found across all genres, including nonfiction texts. Give each student one copy of one of the articles you prepared prior to the lesson. Tell them to read the nonfiction article and Why-Light any examples of the theme words displayed on the slide, then allow them time to do so.

Show **slide 24**. Organize students into small groups of three or four based on the articles they read, grouping students who read the same article together. Instruct students to discuss the topic of the article, what they highlighted, why they highlighted those sections, and how the article is similar to the excerpt from *The Outsiders*.

15 minutes

Evaluate

Pass out one copy of the **Crafting a Theme Statement** handout to each student. Display **slide 25** and introduce the modified 4-2-1 activity. Allow students approximately five minutes to choose three theme statements from the flower petals and record them on their handouts.

Transition to **slide 26** and tell students to analyze their three chosen themes then select the two that best represent both the passage from *The Outsiders* and the nonfiction article. Have them record these two statements on their handout.

Display **slide 27** and tell students to synthesize the two remaining theme statements into one new theme statement that summarizes both readings from the lesson. Tell them to justify their theme statement by recording evidence from the texts that support the theme.

Example 3-2-1 Statement

3 theme statements

- "The strength of a family, like the strength of an army, lies in its loyalty to each other."—Mario Puzo
- "Loyalty is what we seek in friendship."—Cicero
- "You don't earn loyalty in a day. You earn it day-by-day."—Jeffery Gitomer

2 theme statements

- Strength of a group of friends is determined by their loyalty.
- We build loyalty with each other each day.

Final theme statement

- Loyalty between friends is built each day and strengthens the group of friends.

Resources

Aesop. (1919). The kid and the wolf. In *The Aesop for Children*.

Blake, W. (1820). Chapter 4. In *Jerusalem: The emanation of the giant albion*.

Cather, W. (1927). *Death comes for the archbishop*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Danforth, W. H. (1953). *I dare you!*. William H. Danforth.

Donne, J. (1624). *No man is an island*.

Fox, E. (1941). *Find and use your inner power*. Harper and Row.

Garrison, C. (2016). Going to school as a refugee. *CommonLit*. https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/going-to-school-as-a-refugee

Gitomer, J. (1998). *Customer satisfaction is worthless, customer loyalty is priceless*. Bard Press.

Hill, N. (1937). *Think and grow rich*. Duke Classics.

Hinton, S. E. (1967). *The outsiders*. Viking Press.

Ingersoll, R. G. (1882). *Liberty of man, woman and child: Lecture*. C.S. Baldwin.

Kaminsky, M. (2016). Dedicated to the goal. *CommonLit*. https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/dedicated-to-the-goal

K20 Center. (n.d.). 4-2-1. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/142

K20 Center. (n.d.). Walking vote. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/4126

K20 Center. (n.d.). Why-Lighting. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/128

Oscar, W. (1905). De profundis. Putnam's Sons.

Puzo, M. (1969). The godfather. G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Sanders, L. (2013). Fear prompts teens to act impulsively. *CommonLit*. https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/fear-prompts-teens-to-act-impulsively

Shakespeare, W. (1623). *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Surendra, S. (2015). How I found true love in an arranged marriage. *CommonLit*. https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/how-i-found-true-love-in-an-arranged-marriage

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (2016). Courage in Denmark: Resistance to the Nazis in WWII. *CommonLit*. https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/courage-in-denmark-resistance-to-the-nazis-in-wwii