

Power Lessons - Year 5

Theme

Objective: To help students infer and identify the central idea or theme of a story.

Materials: Any fiction book you have recently read to students, such as *Hatchet* by Gary Paulson (5.7).

- Lesson:**
1. Present the following scenario:

Suppose your class is planning to play a trick on a teacher by all turning around in their seats to face the back of the room. Imagine that you think this trick is mean and you don't go along with the plan. The other kids call you a wimp and refuse to play with you at recess.
 2. Ask, "What conclusion might you make from this experience?" Write students' responses on the board.
 3. Tell students that the *theme* of a story is the big idea behind it – what the story is about. Explain that a theme is usually a general statement about life or how people should act. Review the response on the board and say, "If this experience has a theme, it might be that standing up to peer pressure is hard."
 4. Explain to students that while some stories contain sentences that state the story's theme, most imply the theme through the characters' actions or words. Point out that stories may also contain more than one theme. Hold up a novel you have recently read with the class, such as *Hatchet*. Ask, "How might you figure out the theme of this story?" Make sure that your discussion of students' responses includes the following points:
 - Think about the characters' decisions and interactions with others.
 - Look at how the characters (especially the main character) change throughout the book.
 - Think about how the problems in the story are resolved.
 5. Draw a large light bulb on the board. Ask, "What is the big idea or theme of this story?" Point out that a theme is usually stated as a sentence and that it should be general enough to apply to other situations or stories. After the class has agreed on a theme for the book, record it in the centre of the light bulb.
 6. Draw lines radiating from the bulb and ask, "What words or actions from the book show this theme?" Record students' responses on the lines.

What is the big idea or theme of this story?

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7. Tell students that figuring out a book's theme will help them understand what they have read and use what they read to make choices in their own lives.

Status of the Class

Follow up: As you take the Status of the Class, ask:

- What is the main theme of your book?
- How did you figure out what the theme was?
- Which words or actions show the theme?

Added Practice: Encourage students to complete light bulb diagrams listing the theme of a fiction book they are currently reading and details that support the theme.

Help students brainstorm a list of common themes. For example:

- Be true to yourself.
- Appearances can be deceiving.
- Kindness and loyalty bring rewards.
- Encourage students to suggest books that contain each theme. (Remind students that some books contain more than one theme.)

Suggest that groups of students write and act out a skit expressing the theme of a book they have recently read.