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2 Analyzing Theme

PART 1

Introduction

The **theme** of a story is the universal message or lesson about life that is revealed through the events. The story's setting, plot, and characters shape the theme and contribute to its development.

The theme of a story can be revealed by analyzing:

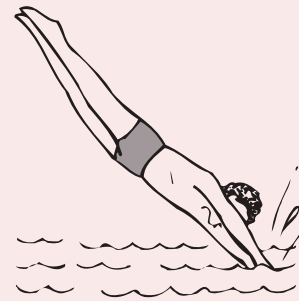
- the title of a story
- repeating patterns and symbols in a story
- implied or indirect references made throughout a story
- details in a story

THEME: >>> Life Changes

Read the passage.

Soaring Into the Future

It was a gorgeous early morning. The water in the pool glistened from the sun, and in the distance sweet, cheerful birds chirped. Saul slowly climbed the ladder of the high diving board. His heart was racing. In his head he recounted his father's encouraging words: "You can do this, Saul" and "Your form is perfect on the low dive. This one's just a little higher—you get to have more fun on the way down!" Like a bird learning to fly, Saul had been practicing for this moment, and the time had come to confront it. He reached the top of the ladder and walked to the end of the diving board. Surprising even himself, without hesitation, he pushed his feet off the edge of the diving board and propelled his body into the air, meeting the water's surface perfectly. It was exhilarating. Saul felt like a new person.



Now analyze the passage for its theme.

What does the title "Soaring Into the Future" imply? successfully moving into unknown territory

What are the story's repeating patterns and symbols? "gorgeous early morning," glistening water, "sweet, cheerful birds" singing, and his father's encouraging words are all uplifting and encouraging symbols

What implied or indirect references are made in the story? Saul's situation is compared to a bird learning to fly.

What details about the characters and events contribute to the key ideas in the story? _____

Think about the story's message, or what can be learned from the story. That message is the theme of the story. Write the theme of this story. _____

Read the first part of the story. Then answer the questions.

from I've Just Heard...

by Lynn August

1 The night before the operation, Dad took me to Pizza Shack. He said we could go wherever I wanted. Dad hated Pizza Shack. He always said the music was too loud. However, he liked his pepperoni and mushroom, and he kept up his end of the conversation as we talked about school, the upcoming tennis season, everything but IT.

2 I was aware again of how elegantly he signed. He sculpted his thoughts with his hands and added nuance with the movements of his head. Most hearing people who can sign do it with what you might call an accent. Even Ms. Tajima at school, who's been teaching kids like me for 20 years, signs in a kind of stumbly way. When I was little, Dad would sign poetry to me as he read it aloud. It was only after I learned to read and to understand what rhyme and meter were that I could appreciate what he had mastered on my behalf.

3 You know what they say about the elephant in the room? There was an elephant between us creating a bit of turmoil in my stomach. Finally, I introduced the subject we had been avoiding by saying, "Dad, if the operation works, do you think you'll forget how to sign?"

4 The question left him—you should pardon the expression—speechless. Then he laughed. "Karen, my grandmother came here from Italy when she was 12." He spoke as he signed, which is like speaking two languages at once. "She never forgot her Italian till the day she died."

5 But will you want to still sign with me if...

6 "If you can hear? Sweetheart, I'm so used to talking to you this way, I think I'd keep doing it automatically."

Think About It

How do the story title and the symbolism in paragraph 3 contribute to the theme? First, think about the central idea of the excerpt.

What does the title "I've Just Heard..." suggest? _____

What is the meaning of the phrase "elephant in the room"? How does it contribute to the story? _____

A CLOSER LOOK

Underline key incidents in the passage that contribute to the story's theme or lesson about life.

Continue reading the story. Then answer the question.

7 “Dad, do you think if I can hear that my deaf friends will be glad for me, or will they reject me? Will my new friends only be hearing people?” Thoughts that had been spinning in my head for a month came boiling out of my fingers. “Am I going to hate Pizza Shack too, or do you think I won’t be able to get enough of music? What is music?” I knew it only as vibrations I could feel through my body, when it was loud enough. (What, for that matter, was “loud”?) I’ve always imagined music as a beautiful building that flows and changes shape. “I think I’m going to want to eat up every sound, whether it’s music or birds singing or a bus pulling away from the corner.”

8 “Take it easy,” Dad signed, and he smiled. “You’re talking.”

9 I was? Sometimes when I got excited I would break into sounds that must have been something like the way I talked when I was 3. I tried to avoid it because it was embarrassing when people thought I was disabled or had just gotten off a plane from Upper Oblivastan.

10 Dad patted my hand, then squeezed it. “It’s cool,” he said, and then he added, “You know, everyone who gets one of these cochlear¹ implants has different results.”

11 I know. I knew that only parts of my hearing might come back, and that it would take time. I wondered whether I’d be surprised. I wondered whether I’d be disappointed, whether I’d think, “Is that all it is?” I just keep wondering what the first sound I’ll hear will be. And how I’d feel if the operation didn’t work.

¹cochlear relating to the cochlea, part of the inner ear

What emotions and concerns do Karen’s thoughts express?

Which statement best describes the theme of the story?

- A Family is more important than friendship.
- B The only constant is change.
- C Father-daughter relationships are extremely special.
- D Change can be difficult, even if it’s desired.

DISCUSS IT

Turn to another student and discuss how Karen’s father eased her concerns about having surgery.

Read the poem. Then answer the questions.

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

by William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
5 Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
10 Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
15 A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
20 In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

A CLOSER LOOK

In the first stanza, underline what the speaker compares himself to. What does this suggest about his relationship to nature?

Which choice expresses what the poem is mainly about?

- 1 Which of the following *best* expresses a key idea in the poem?
- A People sometimes initially fail to appreciate nature's beauty.
 - B Memories of nature haunt people during their daily life.
 - C People tend to remember an event in a better light than it actually was.
 - D Nature's beauty is most apparent during springtime.

Summarize what happens in each stanza in order to analyze how the theme of the poem is revealed.

2 Part A

Which statement *best* reflects a theme of the poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"?

- A Beauty thrives in nature.
- B Nature's beauty uplifts the human spirit.
- C While in nature, no one can live in solitude.
- D It is human nature to be in awe of flowers.

Part B

Which two sets of lines from the poem *best* support the answer to Part A?

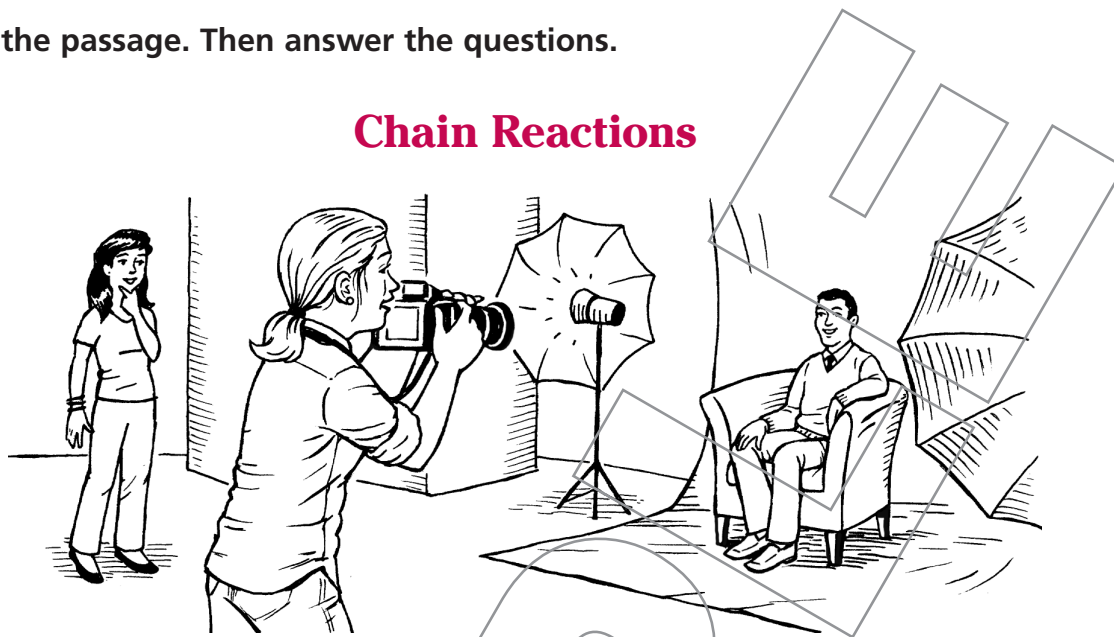
- A "A poet could not but be gay,/In such jocund company:"
- B "I wandered lonely as a cloud/That floats on high o'er vales and hills,"
- C "Ten thousand saw I at a glance,/Tossing their heads in sprightly dance."
- D "I gazed—and gazed—but little thought/What wealth the show to me had brought:"
- E "And then my heart with pleasure fills,/And dances with the daffodils."
- F "For oft, when on my couch I lie/In vacant or in pensive mood,"

- 3 What lesson does the narrator learn in the final stanza? Cite evidence from the poem to support your answer.

In the final stanza, the narrator talks about memories of the past. How does this connect to the lesson he learned?

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Chain Reactions



1 Farrah peered through her camera lens with great trepidation. Although she'd been captivated by photography for over two years, all bets were off today. Photographing flowers in the park was one thing, but taking a portrait of an actual living, breathing human being was an entirely different matter—and it wasn't going well.

2 Her subject, Ari, was initially excited about the shoot, but eventually she became as uncomfortable as Farrah. Feeling stressed and awkward, Farrah fumbled for the knob on the camera that adjusted the exposure and took a picture. She came out from behind the camera and looked at Ari with critical, squinting eyes. The light was awry, and Ari's expression was anything but affable. Farrah took about 35 pictures, but none of them were good. None of them showed Ari's delightful nature and bright, curious eyes; nor did they reflect the elegant contours of Ari's facial features. Dark, hideous shadows abounded, making Ari look almost sinister. Discouraged by the experience, Farrah convinced herself she would never be capable of taking portraits.

3 A week later, a note was posted outside the photo lab. An accomplished portrait photographer named Greta was looking

for an intern. Initially, Farrah dismissed the opportunity, but as the day wore on, it started to appeal to her. Maybe instead of giving up on photographing people she simply needed training. Inspired and hopeful, she set up an interview with the photographer.

4 When she arrived at the photographer's studio, she noticed Greta had a wealth of the finest equipment available. Farrah's immediate reaction was one of intimidation, which Greta detected instantaneously.

5 "Please don't worry if you are unfamiliar with any of the equipment," Greta said. "I'll demonstrate how everything functions until you can manage it yourself."

6 "Thank you, Greta. It's like you read my mind. I am still a beginner at photography so there's a lot for me to learn. *A lot...*" Farrah said, her voice trailing off.

7 "A good portrait photographer is a lot like a good psychologist," Greta replied. "You can identify facial expressions and body language that show what a person is feeling. I could tell the studio intimidated you, though it shouldn't," she assured Farrah. It was exactly what Farrah needed to hear. Her fears were quelled, and the interview progressed flawlessly. She landed the job.

8 A few days later, Farrah arrived at the studio. Greta was preparing for a photo shoot. Farrah noticed as she explained how to work things that Greta was not in the least bit stressed or apprehensive about the portrait's outcome. In fact, she was quite serene, adjusting equipment as she spoke, laughing easily, moving slowly but deliberately.

9 Greta's subject arrived late; he was disheveled and out of sorts. Farrah watched as Greta placated him. Keeping her same peaceful, gentle demeanor, Greta sat him down in a comfortable chair and assured him they had ample time. She transported the lights to where he was seated and slowly

started photographing him. Within minutes, the man's disposition changed dramatically. He was placid, and his expression was soft. The portraits were magnificent.

10 After the portrait session concluded, Farrah couldn't help but ask Greta what her secret was for putting people at ease. Greta smiled. "I don't put people at ease. If I am at ease, then they simply follow suit. Likewise, if I convey restlessness, then in time they will feel restless, too. There is no trick except to feel how you want your subjects to feel."

11 Enlightened, that night Farrah called Ari. "Ari," she said, "Let's try again. This time I know just what to do."

1 Part A

Which statement *best* reflects the theme of the story "Chain Reactions"?

- A People are most productive when they are calm.
- B People's moods are affected by their surroundings.
- C People's level of confidence with unfamiliar tasks can be detected.
- D People must rely on others when they need help.

Part B

Which two details from the story *best* support the answer to Part A?

- A "Farrah's immediate reaction was one of intimidation, which Greta detected instantaneously."
- B "...she was quite serene, adjusting equipment as she spoke, laughing easily, moving slowly but deliberately."
- C "'A good portrait photographer is a lot like a good psychologist,' Greta replied."
- D "'If I am at ease, then they simply follow suit.'"
- E "Her subject, Ari, was initially excited about the shoot, but eventually she became as uncomfortable as Farrah."
- F "'You can identify facial expressions and body language that show what a person is feeling.'"

- 2 Which statement *best* expresses how the development of Farrah's character contributes to the theme of the passage?
- A Farrah initially only photographed objects like flowers, but eventually she became successful at making people's portraits.
 - B Farrah became less intimidated by Greta's state-of-the-art equipment as her internship with Greta progressed.
 - C Farrah learned that photographing people was like being a good psychologist.
 - D Farrah became more at ease with photographing people after being around a photographer who was at ease.
- 3 Farrah's conflict with photography occurred for which of the following reason?
- A Farrah felt pressured to make portraits.
 - B Farrah challenged herself to do something new.
 - C Farrah wanted to impress her friends.
 - D Farrah was concerned she had no talent.
- 4 What was the first sign that Greta would have a positive effect on Farrah? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.
