

Short Story Activity: Theme in “The Open Window” by Saki

- **Theme** is the central idea or message in a story. Themes are usually expressed as generalizations about life.
- **Universal themes** are lessons or ideas that apply to different cultures, places and time periods.

Directions: Use the chart to determine the theme of “The Open Window.” First, record what the topic or subject of the story is. Next, answer the following questions and determine the theme.

Selection Title:	Topic:
How does the protagonist (main character) change throughout the story?	
How is the story’s main conflict resolved?	
What does the title of the story suggest?	
Statement of the theme:	

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Selection Title: “The Open Window”	Topic: Truth
How does the protagonist change throughout the story?	Framton Nuttel is passing time in the country in order to calm his nervousness. Despite his insecurities and uncertainties, he ventures to the house of Mrs. Sappleton with a letter of introduction from his sister. As the story progresses, he becomes more—and not less—nervous and insecure on account of the tragic story Mrs. Sappleton’s niece, Vera, tells him. By the end of the story Framton is completely unhinged emotionally and mentally. Only Vera knows the truth as to why, but she’s not telling.
How is the story’s main conflict resolved?	The story’s main conflict initially appears to be man vs. supernatural; that is, Mrs. Sappleton expects her dead husband to return from the dead, but when he does return, the reader realizes that the supernatural element of the story has been concocted by a mischievous teenage girl. At this point, the reader realizes the primary conflict involves Mr. Nuttel’s battle against nervousness, which he loses on account of Vera’s false tale.
What does the title of the story suggest?	The story’s title highlights the story’s most important symbol, the open window. An open window is a universal symbol for truthfulness, openness, and honesty. Vera uses the open window to introduce the tragedy, which is ironically completely made up. The open window becomes a symbol, therefore, of truth distorted. It also represents a filter through which people observe facts and construct truth. Everyone in the room saw the same exact three men and a dog, but because they had each assigned a particular meaning through their appearance, they all reacted differently.
Statement of the theme: Truth is elusive and highly dependent on the filter through which facts are viewed.	

Analyzing Theme in “The Open Window” Lesson Plan

Standards

1. RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
4. L.9-10.6 Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Notes on Theme

Students should be familiar with the following information in order for your theme lesson plan to be effective:

- Theme is the central idea or message in a literary work. It is an observation about human life.
- Themes are rarely stated directly. They must be inferred.
- The theme is revealed by the way characters change in a story, conflicts in the story, and statements made by the narrator or characters.
- Understanding theme involves understanding plot, characters, and setting.

Strategies for Teaching Theme

1. **Discuss Plot** by analyzing cause and effect and identifying major and minor conflicts.

Example: Although it’s not totally clear why Vera chooses to tell stories, evidence suggests she’s bored. She lives in a place where people come to calm down. Not a lot of excitement for a 15-year-old girl.

2. **Analyze character motivation** by noting which characters are dynamic and which ones are static. Look for evidence regarding character motives. Evaluate the character’s personality.

Example: They all think Framton has gone completely nuts when he bolts out of the house without explanation. As it turns out he’s just stupid for believing the story

3. **Visualize setting** by evaluating what effect the setting has on the characters and on the mood of the story.

Example: The rural setting lacks excitement. Seems like Vera has a lot of time to create stories.

Procedures

This lesson can be done as you read “The Open Window” and finished once the story is completed.

1. Discuss theme. Take a look at the notes above. This can be part of note-taking or just a discussion.
2. Find specific examples in “The Open Window” that provide evidence for one of the story’s themes.
3. Complete the theme graphic organizer.
4. Discuss student discoveries with a small group and/or full class discussion.
5. Optional: Write a theme analysis of “The Open Window.”

Assessment

The graphic organizer is an excellent opportunity to practice and discuss the lesson’s stated objectives. In most cases it should be considered a formative assignment. In order to determine individual student mastery, there are questions on the short story quiz (included). A theme analysis writing assignment would also suffice.

Literary Analysis Writing Assignment

	A	B	C	D
Content/Analysis X2	The writer analyzes and interprets the story's theme(s) correctly. The analysis goes beyond the superficial. The writer takes a clear stand on supporting his or her chosen theme. The writer uses well-developed, relevant evidence to support his or her conclusions with intelligent, thought-provoking analysis.	The writer analyzes and interprets the story's theme(s) correctly. The analysis goes beyond the superficial. The writer takes a clear stand on supporting his or her chosen theme. The writer uses evidence to support his or her conclusions but there may be an example or two of not relevant evidence or analysis.	The writer analyzes and interprets the story's theme(s) correctly. The writer takes a wishy-washy stand on the theme. The writer uses evidence to support his or her conclusions but the analysis is shallow.	There is an attempt to analyze the story's theme. There's an attempt to use relevant evidence. There's an attempt to analyze. Unfortunately, the attempts are mostly unsuccessful.
Organization	The essay looks like an essay. There is an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Each body paragraph contains a main idea that is supported in a logical manner using evidence and analysis/logic/insight.	The essay looks like an essay. There is an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Each body paragraph contains a main idea that is mostly supported in a logical manner using evidence and analysis/logic/insight.	The essay looks like an essay. There is an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Each body paragraph contains a main idea that is not supported in a logical manner using evidence and analysis/logic/insight.	The essay looks like an essay. There is an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.
Format	All quotations are set up and formatted correctly.			All quotations are not set up and formatted correctly.
Conventions	There are no mistakes in spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.	There are 1-2 mistakes in spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.	There are 3-4 mistakes in spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.	There are 5-6 mistakes in spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.

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