

## Notes on Theme

Students should be familiar with the following information 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:** The primary conflict involves Phoenix Jackson trying to save her grandson. We don't learn about this until the end of the story.

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:** Jackson is motivated by the love of her grandson.

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

**Example:** The trail and the city post different types of challenges to the protagonist.

## Analyzing Theme in Literature

Theme is the unifying or dominant idea in a work of art.

**Directions:** Fill in the chart below. In the left column is written a theme from the story you are reading. In the middle column, identify a specific example from the story. In the right column, explain how your example fits that theme.

Theme	Specific Example	Explanation
<b>The Power of Perseverance</b>	Phoenix Jackson makes this obstacle filled journey into town every month.	Phoenix's tireless commitment to make this journey every month demonstrates what determination and love can help one accomplish.
<b>Love as a Powerful Motivator</b>		
<b>Versions of Reality</b>		
<b>Being the Outsider</b>		
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<b>Love as a Powerful Motivator</b>	The nurse gives Phoenix the medicine for her grandson. Phoenix takes the medicine and picks up a toy for the journey home.	Throughout the story, the reader wonders why Phoenix Jackson would make this journey. Then we discover, at the end, that she does so monthly. Then we discover, also at the end, that she does it to help her grandson.
<b>Versions of Reality</b>	Phoenix Jackson talks to and sees things that aren't there.	Altered reality is symbolic. Jackson experiences life as a poor, old, black woman in the Deep South, which is a very specific experience, distinct from those of say, white people or people with money. Phoenix faces certain obstacles because of her age, race, gender, and class that others of different ages, races, or genders might not face or might face in different ways.
<b>Being the Outsider</b>	Phoenix asks someone to tie her shoe once she arrives into town.	Phoenix is the outsider in many ways. One includes her rural way of life. Once she arrives into town, she realizes rural ways won't cut it in the big city.
<b>Being the Outsider</b>	The hunter pulls a gun on Phoenix. But it's only a joke. (Ha! Ha! Freaking hilarious!)	But racism is only one of the many -isms Phoenix is up against. There's also ageism, classism, and you could even make a case for some sexism. Most of the characters seem to problematize her age and poverty more so than her race, but when the hunter (the most threatening character) appears in the story, there is a confrontation centering on race.