

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: The primary conflict involves Jonathan vs the dangerous society he lives in.

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: Jonathan is motivated by a desire to make his life and his family's life better.

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

Example: The setting has beaten down most in the village—the homeless coal miner, the thieves, the neighbors—but not Jonathan, who focuses on the good only.

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
The Power of Positivity	"Jonathan Iwegbu counted himself extraordinarily lucky." "I count it as nothing," he told his sympathizers, his eyes on the rope he was tying."	Jonathan is able to remain positive despite going through things that would destroy most people. Note that Jonathan counted himself extraordinarily lucky. It's a characteristic he prescribes to himself.
The Value of Hard Work		
The Violence Inherent in Society		
The Damaging Effects of Colonialism		
The Power of Faith		

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
<p>The Power of Positivity</p>	<p>“Jonathan Iwegbu counted himself extraordinarily lucky.”</p> <p>“I count it as nothing,” he told his sympathizers, his eyes on the rope he was tying.”</p>	<p>Jonathan is able to remain positive despite going through things that would destroy most people. Note that Jonathan counted himself extraordinarily lucky. It’s a characteristic he prescribes to himself.</p>
<p>The Value of Hard Work</p>	<p>“At the first sign of light as neighbors and others assembled to commiserate with him he was already strapping his five-gallon demijohn to his bicycle carrier and his wife, sweating in the open fire, was turning over akara balls in a wide clay bowl of boiling oil.”</p>	<p>In a world where everything shuts down after the slightest of inconveniences, Jonathan and his wife are victims of a home invasion and wake up early to start working the next morning.</p>
<p>The Violence Inherent in Post-War Society</p>	<p>“No Civil War again. This time na Civil Peace. No be so?””</p>	<p>The thieves mock Jonathan with the declaration that the Civil War is over, but there is still Civil Peace. Civil Peace doesn’t sound too good to me.</p>
<p>The Damaging Effects of Colonialism</p>	<p>In 1967, Nigeria entered a civil war when the country’s southeastern territories declared independence, calling themselves the Republic of Biafra. The Biafrans, most of whom belonged to the Igbo ethnic group, said they broke away from Nigeria because another ethnic group, called the Hausa, had massacred Igbo in the north. After nearly three years of war, the Biafrans surrendered. More than one million people had died in battle or from starvation. “Civil Peace” unfolds in the aftermath of this war.</p>	<p>When Europe divided up Africa into nations, they ignored ethnic differences, sometimes separating tribes and sometimes grouping enemy tribes together. In Nigeria alone, there are over 250 ethnic groups.</p>
<p>The Power of Faith</p>	<p>“Nothing puzzles God,” he said in wonder.</p>	<p>Jonathan doesn’t question the bad things in life. This is the modern equivalent of “Everything happens for a reason.” It’s this faith that allows him to remain so positive.</p>