

IDENTIFYING THEME

Theme is the central message that stretches through an entire story, drama or poem. You can think of the theme of a story as being like the lesson, or the real world application of the story. Themes often explore timeless and universal ideas. Themes can be stated outright, or they can be just implied. Some common themes are:

Be prepared

Betraying a friend also hurts you.

Revenge hurts the avenger.

Looking at fables—short stories that contain a lesson—is a good way to start thinking about theme. Read the following fables and see if you can identify which of the themes above belong to each story.

1. The Donkey, the Fox and the Lion

A donkey and a fox decided to team up to find food together. They were travelling in the forest when they crossed paths with a lion. They were both scared. But the fox hoped to save himself. He approached the lion and offered to help him get the donkey, if the lion would let him escape unharmed.

The lion agreed. So the fox and the donkey walked on, with the lion trailing behind them. The fox led the donkey to a hidden pit, left by some long-ago hunter as a trap for wild animals, and the donkey fell in. As soon as the donkey was in the pit, the lion came out of hiding and ate the fox. Then he ate the donkey.

The theme of this story is:

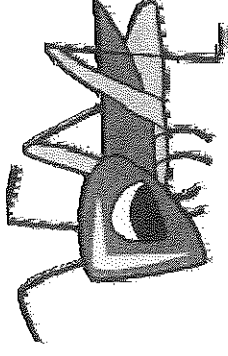


2. The Ant and the Grasshopper

It was a beautiful spring day. The grasshopper was flitting about, enjoying himself, when he crossed paths with an ant. The ant was working very hard, carrying bits of food deep down into his anthill. "Why are you working so hard?" The grasshopper said. "I want to have plenty to eat," the ant replied. The grasshopper laughed. "Plenty to eat!" he cried. "Why there is food everywhere that you look!" "That's true," the ant said. "There is enough food for today. But there will come a day when it won't be true." The grasshopper hopped away, not wanting to bother with the morose little ant.

Soon spring gave way to summer, summer to fall, and fall to winter. When the fields were covered with snow, the ant sat far down in his anthill, safe and warm, his stomach full, confident that he had enough to eat to see him through the winter. The grasshopper, who had not made any preparations for winter, shivered, and went from one friend to another begging for food and feeling very foolish indeed.

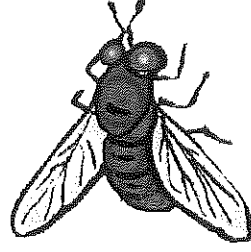
The theme of this story is: _____



3. The Bald Man and the Fly

A fly bit a bald man on the head. The man tried to shoo the fly away. But the fly landed on the man's head and bit him again. This made the man furious. He slapped his head to squash the fly, but the fly flew away just before the man delivered a stinging slap to his own head. The fly landed on the man's head a third time and laughed at him. "You would hurt yourself just to get back at me?" he taunted. The man was so enraged that he tried to hit the fly with a rock. Instead he knocked himself, senseless, to the ground.

The theme of this story is: _____



Name: _____

Date: _____

Theme

Directions: Choose the moral that is illustrated by the events. Fill in the correct answer on the answer page.

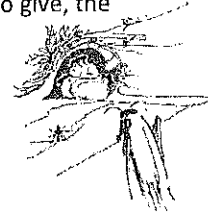
1. Once a cat was in a hurry. She ran across the street without looking. She narrowly escaped being hit by a car.
 - a. Don't steal.
 - b. Look both ways before crossing the street.
 - c. Necessity is the mother of invention.
 - d. One good turn deserves another.

2. Long ago a beautiful princess had all beautiful expensive dresses. She bragged about them all the time. The other maidens got so tired of hearing about it that they stopped being friends with her.
 - a. Eat all your vegetables.
 - b. Necessity is the mother of invention.
 - c. Don't brag; be modest.
 - d. Don't talk to strangers.

3. Once there was a young boy and an old man. The young boy laughed at the tired, slow old man. Then the young boy needed to interview a veteran for a school project. The old man was very helpful and the boy got an A+ on his paper. The boy felt bad about laughing earlier.
 - a. Necessity is the mother of invention.
 - b. Don't steal.
 - c. Respect your elders.
 - d. Slowly but surely wins the race.

4. A long time ago there was a king who wanted nothing but gold. He wished everything he touched turned into gold. A fairy made this wish come true. Then anything he tried to eat turned into gold, so he starved to death.
 - a. Don't be greedy.
 - b. United we stand; divided we fall.
 - c. Don't steal.
 - d. Respect your elders.

5. There were once some hardworking ants and a grasshopper who hated to work. The ants gathered food all spring while the grasshopper played. When winter came, the ants had enough food, but grasshopper had nothing to eat. Since the ants had no extra food to give, the grasshopper starved.
 - a. Don't be lazy.
 - b. Slowly but surely wins the race.
 - c. Don't steal.
 - d. Look before you leap.



6. There once was an ugly duckling. The other ducks laughed at her, and she felt ashamed. However, as she developed, they saw that she was not a duck at all. She was actually a swan, and she was beautiful.

- a. Look both ways before crossing the street.
- b. Don't steal.
- c. Slowly but surely wins the race.
- d. We all are capable of improvement.

7. A lion was about to eat a mouse, when the mouse pleaded, "Let me go, and someday I may help you." Laughing, the lion let the mouse go. Later, hunters caught the lion in a trap. The mouse, seeing what happened, came to chew the ropes that bound the lion. The lion escaped.

- a. Respect your elders.
- b. Don't be lazy.
- c. Help others because what goes around comes around.
- d. We all are capable of improvement.

8. Once a frog jumped off an embankment into what he assumed was a pond. Unfortunately it was not a pond; it was just a ditch. There was a raccoon in the ditch that ate him.

- a. Respect your elders.
- b. Don't steal.
- c. Look before you leap.
- d. Don't be boastful.

9. A young child was stopped by a man. The man asked her if she would help him find his lost puppy, and if she helped him he would give her candy. The child ran away and told a teacher what happened. Later on "American's Most Wanted" they recognized that man. He was a wanted kidnapper.

- a. Look both ways before crossing the street.
- b. Don't talk to strangers.
- c. Don't steal.
- d. Be polite.

10. There was once a tiny fish that was tired of being in the school of fish all the time. He picked a fight with a couple of the other fish, and said "I don't need you; I'm leaving." So he swam away, without the protection of the group, and was soon eaten by a bigger fish.

- a. Slowly but surely wins the race.
- b. Don't be lazy.
- c. We are all capable of improvement.
- d. United we stand, divided we fall.

11. A Hare once bragged to all the animals that he could beat anyone in a race. A tortoise said, "I challenge you." So they raced. The hare ran fast and the tortoise plodded along. The hare was so confident that he took a nap. The tortoise kept up his steady pace and won the race.

- a. Slowly but surely wins the race.
- b. Don't be lazy.
- c. We are all capable of improvement.
- d. United we stand, divided we fall.

