



Infer and Distinguish Theme from Topic in Literature

Ⓢ 3.8(A), Ⓢ 3.9(A), Ⓡ 3.10(A), Ⓡ 3.6(E), Ⓡ 3.6(F), Ⓡ 3.7(C)

Understand the TEKS

Well-known Children's Literature

The traditional tales of well-known children's literature are common throughout the world and explain important things about life and the world around us. A **fable** is a story that is meant to teach people a lesson. A **myth** is a story that explains the creation of something in the world. A **legend** is a story about an important event or person. A **folktale** is a story passed down through the years and is usually not like real life. A **fairy tale** is a story with magic and characters who are royalty, like kings and queens.

Author's Purpose and Theme

An **author's purpose** is the author's reason for writing a story. When authors write stories, they usually have a reason for doing it.

The meaning of any story is its **theme**. It is what the story shows you about life. Theme can sometimes be confused with the **topic** of the story. The topic is the subject of the story, and the theme is the big idea, or **message**, the author wants you to understand.

Inferences

An author will not often come right out and say what the theme of a story is. You have to make an **inference**, or a clever guess. When you read, you think about the facts and details the author tells you. This is the evidence that you use to make an inference. However, making a strong inference involves one more thing—your own experience. When you connect evidence with what you already know, you are making an inference.

Evidence from Text + What I Know = Inference



Did You Know?

Comprehension

Sometimes authors do not tell you everything. As you read a traditional tale, try to find the message that the author is trying to express.



★ Practice

Read the selection below. Then answer the questions that follow it.

The Woman in the Moon

*A Kumeyaay Legend
retold by Jeannie Beck*

- 1 A long time ago, a group of native people in Southern California traveled between the mountains and the ocean in search of food and comfort. They gathered acorns, mushrooms, and berries from the mountains. They fished and found sea plants and crabs by the sea. What they found to eat depended on each season's gifts. These people called themselves Kumeyaay.
- 2 Since travel was a natural part of their lives, they had no need for building permanent homes. They often lived in dwellings made of branches and clay, which could easily be taken apart when no longer in use.
- 3 The Kumeyaay knew that all people and animals belonged to the Earth equally, like brothers and sisters. So they shared the Earth's gifts and never took more than they needed.
- 4 Still, one year was very hard. There wasn't enough food, no matter how far they traveled. The people felt weaker every day, and their babies grew restless. Soon the people became too tired to travel at all.
- 5 One spring night, a young Kumeyaay mother took her baby into an open field to sleep under the moonlight. But because she was hungry and concerned for her people, she had trouble sleeping.
- 6 The young mother looked into the fullness of the moon and asked for help for all the people.
- 7 She turned to soothe her baby and prepare herself for sleep. Just then, she saw a great ball of light falling across the sky. It appeared to land close to where she was.
- 8 She stood and found the glow in a nearby meadow. The trees, grass, rocks, and stream were all bathed in a pleasing light, so she was not afraid to step into its circle.

- 9 Then she saw the most beautiful woman she had ever seen. The beautiful woman smiled as if she had always known the young mother. "I came when I heard you calling," she said.
- 10 "Where have you come from?" the young woman asked.
- 11 The beautiful woman pointed up at the full moon. "I came down because you asked for help unselfishly, for all the people." Then the moon woman opened her hand, revealing a pile of bright kernels, gleaming like stardust in the night. The young mother had never seen anything like this.
- 12 "Plant these when the moon is full, and remember me," said the moon woman. And she explained how to harvest and prepare the kernels, which she called corn. The young mother took the kernels in her hand.
- 13 Just then, the baby started to cry. "Bring her to me," said the moon woman. She smiled. "I have a gift for her also."
- 14 When the young mother returned, the moon woman took the baby in her arms and began to sing. The young mother had heard many types of songs in her life but never one so sweet and enchanting.
- 15 The baby soon fell into a peaceful sleep. "That was a lullaby," the moon woman said. She handed the baby back to the mother's arms. "Sing it to all the children who have trouble sleeping, and remember me." With those last words, the moon woman disappeared in a ball of light.
- 16 That spring, the young Kumeyaay mother taught the people how to grow corn, and she also taught them to sing lullabies. After this, the people didn't have to travel so often or far in search of food, and they sang their restless children into peaceful sleep. And some children, even today, have seen the face of that woman smiling down from the moon. The elders say that as long as there are generous hearts, the moon woman will be remembered.



- 1** Read paragraph 1. Which inference can be made about the Kumeyaay people?
- A** They did not have the skills to survive in the wild.
 - B** They had more experience hunting and fishing than farming.
 - C** They wasted the harvest collected from their surroundings.
 - D** They depended on nature to provide for their needs.
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- 2** This story is a legend because —
- A** the Kumeyaay overcame a big problem
 - B** it is about an important person in Kumeyaay culture
 - C** it is about a Kumeyaay mother who saves her children
 - D** the Kumeyaay learned a valuable lesson
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- 3** Based on the information in paragraph 3, with which statement would the author most likely agree?
- A** Human beings are the most important living things on Earth.
 - B** Animals depend on the Earth's gifts more than people.
 - C** All living things deserve to be treated with respect.
 - D** People must be sure to harvest more than enough food to eat.
- 4** In paragraph 4, the author says, "Soon the people became too tired to travel at all." Given what you know about the Kumeyaay people's way of life, which of the following might this mean for the people?
- A** They will not be able to find enough food to survive.
 - B** They will no longer have to build permanent homes.
 - C** They will begin to believe in the importance of respecting nature.
 - D** They will learn how to live off the land.
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- 5** Based on the details in the passage, which of these can you infer about the young Kumeyaay mother?
- A** She would do anything to protect her baby.
 - B** She no longer wanted to travel to find food.
 - C** She was a leader and not afraid of anything.
 - D** She was worried about the future of her people.

6 Which sentence explains the author's purpose for why the young mother most likely asked the moon for help in paragraph 6?

- A** Her loved ones were losing hope that nature would provide for their needs.
- B** She believed nature had the power to give gifts to her people.
- C** Her friends and family had asked her to find a solution to their problem.
- D** She knew the moon had helped her people in the past.

8 Which details support that "The Woman in the Moon" is a legend? Choose the two correct answers.

- A** The Kumeyaay people built dwellings made of branches and clay.
- B** The moon woman taught the mother how to plant corn.
- C** The mother saw a great ball of light falling from the sky.
- D** The people learned about lullabies to help their babies sleep.
- E** The people encountered more trouble than ever before.

7 Part A

Which of the following is the theme of this legend?

- A** If you are a good, unselfish person, people are likely to help you.
- B** Singing lullabies to babies helps them sleep when they are upset.
- C** You do not have to travel far to find food.
- D** Corn is a good crop to know how to grow.

Part B

Which paragraph in the passage most strongly shows the theme?

- A** Paragraph 5
- B** Paragraph 16
- C** Paragraph 15
- D** Paragraph 1

9 How is the topic different from the theme in this legend?

- A** The topic is Southern California, and the theme is you do not have to travel far to find food.
- B** The topic is the Kumeyaay people, and the theme is people will help you if you are a good person.
- C** The topic is about Earth's gifts to people, and the theme is that the Kumeyaay people are good people.
- D** The topic is about growing corn to eat, and the theme is about food in Southern California.