



# Infer Multiple Themes Within and Across Literary Texts

S 6.7(A), S 6.8(A), R 6.9(A), R 6.5(F)

## Understand the TEKS

Stories can be classified into different **literary genres**. Often the content of the story helps determine the literary genre it falls under. **Realistic fiction** tells a story that is not true but could happen. **Adventure stories** contain a lot of excitement, danger, and a sense of grand adventure.

**Historical fiction** is a literary genre in which the setting takes place in the past, following the customs of the time. The characters never existed but could have existed in the past. **Mysteries** are stories with a question that needs to be solved. Many times a mystery focuses on solving a crime or a secret. **Humor** stories have a lot of comedy in them. They are designed to make you laugh. **Myths** are traditional stories that usually tell of early history and explain a supernatural event.

Every literary work, no matter its genre, has a **theme**. The theme is the central message, or important idea in a story. The author does not always explicitly state the theme. Instead, readers get clues to the theme through characters' thoughts, actions, and dialogue. By drawing conclusions about the evidence from the text, the reader can understand the central message or the life lesson of the story.

Themes do not apply to only one character in a story; they can apply to anyone and everyone in a story or in real life. Themes can be universal, which means they are repeated by different authors, across different stories and in many cultures. Themes often express something about what it means to be human.

Each story also contains a **message**. The message is the conclusion authors want you to come to after reading their work. A message is different than the theme, although they are related!

Look at the example below.

The theme of "The Tortoise and the Hare" is "Slow and steady wins the race."  
The message is "Have patience, keep trying, you will succeed, and do not think so highly of yourself if you are good at something."

Ask questions to infer the theme of a text.

- What motivates the main character?
- What challenges do the characters face?
- How does this story reflect human nature?
- What is the central meaning or message of the story?

Once you have determined the theme of a text, ask yourself, "How does the theme work in real life?" to determine the author's message.



### Did You Know?

**Theme** When a character in a story grows and changes, stop and think. Ask yourself what lesson the character has learned.



## ★ Practice

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

## The List



- 1 Thursday at 3:00 was the much-awaited time when the coach said the list would be posted on the gym doors, the list of names that would reveal who made the girls' soccer team at school this year. Last year I was ecstatic about reading that list, but this year I didn't feel quite the same. Most of the girls hustled excitedly toward the doors to look at the list, but I hung back a bit, not wanting to be disappointed in front of the others if my name wasn't there. Just as I was walking toward the door, I saw Elizabeth give a triumphant high-five to one of her friends. I felt a pang of—I'm not sure what it was—some awful blend of envy and disappointment, I suppose. Elizabeth is the star of pretty much every sport at our school. She plays volleyball and basketball and runs track, and she's fantastic at all of them. She's one of the main reasons that our school went to the regional softball championships last year. She's what my dad would call "a natural."
- 2 This was the first year that Elizabeth had tried out for soccer though. Even though it was one of the only sports that she didn't already play for the school, I just knew in my gut that she had made the team and taken the spot I played last year. I glanced up at the list and saw my name toward the bottom, which wasn't a good sign. I looked upward, cautiously, toward the top of the list where the coach had posted the starting lineup. Sure enough, just as I feared, Elizabeth had gotten my spot as middle defender. I was now the second string, and I felt crushed. I knew that Elizabeth probably deserved the spot, but I still wished it were me. I wished I could be a fraction of her perfection at EVERYTHING!
- 3 As soon as practices started, I could see that Elizabeth was so much better than I was, and I just knew I'd never get a chance to play. Elizabeth surprised me though, by coming up to me one practice and asking if I wanted to kick the ball around with her. She said, "I know that I'm playing the spot you played in last year. If you want, we can practice together."

4 "Sure," I replied, "that would be great." The coach noticed us working together at practices and seemed to be impressed with what he saw. I also felt like I had learned a lot from practicing with Elizabeth. Not only was she a great player, but she had turned out to be a really nice person, too. I enjoyed spending time with her, much to my surprise.

5 One day after practice, Elizabeth ran over to me.

6 "Hey, Carolina!" she shouted. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

7 "Yeah, what's up?" I asked.

8 "Well, I wanted to ask you for a favor. You are a math whiz, aren't you?" Elizabeth asked.

9 "I guess so," I replied.

10 "Do you think you could help me with studying for the test next week? I didn't do very well on the last one, and if I don't do better on this one, my mom says I'll have to take a break from sports," Elizabeth admitted.

11 Wow, was I hearing this correctly? Was there really something that Elizabeth wasn't great at? I was genuinely shocked to find this out.

12 "Of course, I'll help you study," I replied. "We can get together after practice at my house."

13 We worked diligently at practice that week and even more so after practice, studying for our upcoming math test. She taught me some new footwork, and I explained tricky equations to her.

14 "You are so great at math," she told me one afternoon. "I wish math came easily to me."

15 "You will get it," I told her. "It just takes a lot of practice."

16 Inside, I couldn't help but think back on the day I found out that Elizabeth had made the team. I was so jealous of her; so envious, wishing I could be as perfect as I thought she was. We had undoubtedly learned a lot from one another that season.

17 Elizabeth aced her math test the following week with a 94 percent. She thanked me repeatedly and even gushed to our teammates how brilliant I was at math. By the end of the season, the coach had the two of us splitting time on the field during games. Each time I scored a goal that year, she celebrated just as much as I did.

18 That fall soccer season wasn't what I had expected it to be at all. I made a new friend, and we helped each other grow. Elizabeth had always seemed so perfect to me, but learning that she needed help with some things made me realize that no one is perfect, and that we can learn from the strengths of our friends.



- 1** Which literary genre is the story “The List” best classified as?
- A** Realistic fiction
  - B** Historical fiction
  - C** Adventure story
  - D** Humor story

- 2** Which clue helps the reader determine the literary genre of the text?
- A** The author uses the past tense in the text.
  - B** The author asks a question to create suspense.
  - C** The author provides action and adventure.
  - D** The author chooses characters that could really exist.

- 3** Which theme can the reader infer in paragraph 1?
- A** Carolina is trying to make her family proud.
  - B** Carolina is feeling jealous.
  - C** Carolina is a good athlete.
  - D** Carolina is angry at her coach.

- 4** Which sentence from the story best conveys the author’s message?
- A** *I was now the second string, and I felt crushed.* (paragraph 2)
  - B** *As soon as practices started, I could see that Elizabeth was so much better than I was, and I just knew I’d never get a chance to play.* (paragraph 3)
  - C** *I was so jealous of her; so envious, wishing I could be as perfect as I thought she was.* (paragraph 16)
  - D** *Elizabeth had always seemed so perfect to me, but learning that she needed help with some things made me realize that no one is perfect, and that we can learn from the strengths of our friends.* (paragraph 18)

- 5** Which sentence from the beginning of the story supports the inference that, at first, Carolina does not see Elizabeth as she really is?
- A** *Elizabeth is the star of pretty much every sport at our school.* (paragraph 1)
  - B** *She’s one of the main reasons that our school went to the regional softball championships last year.* (paragraph 1)
  - C** *Sure enough, just as I feared, Elizabeth had gotten my spot as middle defender.* (paragraph 2)
  - D** *I wished I could be a fraction of her perfection at EVERYTHING!* (paragraph 2)

6 Which statement best describes how Elizabeth contributes to the theme of the text?

- A Elizabeth is a great teammate.
- B Elizabeth is only good at sports.
- C Elizabeth struggles with reading.
- D Elizabeth has a hard time with academic projects.

7 Which inference can the reader make about Elizabeth's mom?

- A She values academics.
- B She is strict.
- C She was an athlete too.
- D She is proud of her daughter.

8 Read this sentence from paragraph 4.

*The coach noticed us working together at practices and seemed to be impressed with what he saw.*

Which inference can the reader make about the coach?

- A The coach wants the best players to help the worst players.
- B The coach hopes the teammates become friends.
- C The coach values hard work and practice.
- D The coach is afraid some players will miss games because of their grades.

9 **Part A**

The main theme of the story is that —

- A everyone wants to be needed
- B working hard is not worth it
- C it is important to be truthful
- D nobody is perfect

**Part B**

Which sentence from the story best supports your answer in Part A?

- A *She plays volleyball and basketball and runs track, and she's fantastic at all of them.* (paragraph 1)
- B *Sure enough, just as I feared, Elizabeth had gotten my spot as middle defender.* (paragraph 2)
- C *We worked diligently at practice that week and even more so after practice, studying for our upcoming math test.* (paragraph 13)
- D *Elizabeth had always seemed so perfect to me, but learning that she needed help with some things made me realize that no one is perfect, and that we can learn from the strengths of our friends.* (paragraph 18)

10 Which sentences best describe the author's message in the story? Select **TWO** correct answers.

- A To be good at something, you have to practice.
- B Sharing what you are good at can help other people.
- C Some people have natural athletic talent, others are good at math.
- D Everyone has different strengths, and it is best when you share them.
- E Your teammates should be your best friends.