

Lesson Skill: Understanding theme

Strand Reading--fiction

SOL 6.5
7.5
8.5

Materials

- None

Lesson

1. Open the lesson by telling about a time when you learned something important about yourself or about life. An example might be a childhood experience that taught you the importance of listening to your parents' advice.
2. Have students write in response to this writing prompt: "Describe an experience you had when you learned an important lesson—an experience you would feel comfortable sharing with a small group. What happened? What did you learn?" Encourage students to write for ten to fifteen minutes.
3. When students are finished, ask them to go back and underline any parts that explain what they learned.
4. Model retelling your story from step one without mentioning what you learned. Then, ask one or two student volunteers to do the same thing, reminding them that they should avoid any mention of the parts of their story that they underlined. They may read their story or just use it as an aid in retelling.
5. After the volunteers have finished, have the other students write what they think the message or lesson was for each of these stories. Then allow each student to share his/her idea with a neighbor.
6. Ask students to raise their hands if what they heard from their neighbor was basically the same as what they wrote. Have one or two pairs share their similar ideas. Then, ask students to raise their hands if what they heard from their neighbor was different from what they wrote, and have one or two pairs share their different ideas.
7. Tell students that they have been identifying *theme*, which is the message that an author conveys. Point out that just like the different messages that were identified in the volunteers' stories, different themes can sometimes be identified in a text. On the other hand, sometimes there is only one theme in a text—one message the author wants to convey. Give an example of an incorrect theme based on one of the volunteers' stories.
8. Tell students that they are going to practice identifying themes by listening to each other's stories. Divide students into groups of three to five, and have members of each group take turns telling their stories while avoiding any mention of the lesson they learned. While they read or retell, other students in the group must identify the lesson or theme and

write it down. Group members then share the themes they wrote, and the storyteller shares the lesson he/she learned. If a theme other than the intended one is identified, the group must decide whether it is a valid interpretation based on the story.

9. Close the lesson by reminding students that the theme is the author's message, and that while different themes may be correct, all must be based on what the author has written.