

Character Quest: How Themes Grow

Textual Evidence, Inference & Theme: Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences by citing textual evidence; determine how a theme is conveyed through particular details and provide an objective summary; analyze how a sentence, chapter, or scene fits into the overall structure and develops the theme, characterization, setting, or plot.

Learning target: I can make inferences about a literary text and support them with the strongest evidence, and explain how details develop a theme.

Success looks like: Students use the vocabulary correctly, complete the quest, and score 80% or higher on the evidence-based exit ticket.

Materials: Student devices, the printed lesson worksheet (one per student), projector for the mini-lesson presenter.

LESSON AT A GLANCE

60 minutes

Time	Part	Teacher does	Students do
0:00-0:08	Warm-up	Project the warm-up. Circulate, then call on 2-3 students. Save question 3 for the debrief.	Answer Part 2 of the lesson worksheet; share with a partner.
0:08-0:20	Mini-lesson	Teach with the 4-step presenter. Run each quick check with the whole class.	Complete worksheet Parts 4-11 as each slide appears; answer checks with fingers.
0:20-0:48	Quest	Launch Character Quest: How Themes Grow. Assign mission levels; circulate with the answer key.	Play solo or in pairs; record code pieces; complete any written evidence task.
0:48-0:52	Debrief	Ask 2 debrief questions and revisit warm-up question 3.	Finish worksheet Part 13 (prediction check + one thing learned).
0:52-1:00	Exit ticket	Hand out the exit ticket. Collect and sort with the mastery guide.	Answer with evidence independently.

Key vocabulary

Word	Student-friendly definition
Inference	A logical conclusion based on text clues plus what you already know.
Explicit	Stated directly in the text.
Textual evidence	Words or sentences from the text that support an idea.
Theme	A universal message about life developed through the story.

Word	Student-friendly definition
Characterization	How an author reveals what a character is like: speech, thoughts, actions, and effects on others.

1. WARM-UP

0:00–0:08 · 8 min

Warm-up expectations (post these): Answer in Part 2 of the lesson worksheet (or on this sheet). Number each answer to match the question. Answer in complete sentences. For math, show your work. Work silently for 5 minutes, then share with a partner for 2 minutes. Be ready to share one answer with the class.

#	Question	Look for
1	Your friend comes in with wet hair and a dripping umbrella. What can you infer? What clues did you use?	It is raining outside. Clues: wet hair, dripping umbrella.
2	What is the difference between something a text SAYS and something it SHOWS?	Says = explicit, stated directly. Shows = implied; you infer it from clues.
3	Write one sentence starter you could use to introduce a quote.	Examples: "The text states...", "According to the author...", "For example..."

2. MINI-LESSON

0:08–0:20 · 12 min

Project the Lesson presenter from the room page. It runs the whole hour: target and agenda, warm-up with timer, hook vote, 4 teaching steps (key idea, interactive tool, turn and talk, check for understanding), I do / we do / you do, a work-time screen with a timer and expectations, debrief, and the exit ticket. Press N for teacher notes, T to pause the timer, and P to pick a student.

Hook (1 min): A girl walks in, drops her backpack, slams her binder down, and says nothing. How does she feel? Class vote: Happy / Upset / Sleepy

Step 1 (3 min): Explicit vs. inference

Teach	Explicit means the text says it. An inference is what the text shows: Text clue + What I know = Inference.
Interactive tool	Visual: chain
Students do	Complete Text clue + What I know = Inference for: "Jada checked the clock for the fifth time."
Turn and talk	Why don't authors just tell us everything directly?
Worksheet Part 5A	Text clue + WHAT I KNOW = INFERENCE.
Check for understanding	"Jada checked the clock for the fifth time and tugged her sleeve." You can infer Jada is: Answer: (A) Nervous

Step 2 (3 min): Strong vs. weak evidence

Teach	Strong evidence directly proves the claim. Weak evidence is about the topic but does not prove the specific point.
Interactive tool	Board and notes
Students do	Rank the two pieces of evidence in the check from strongest to weakest.
Turn and talk	How can a quote be about the right topic and still be weak evidence?
Worksheet Part 6A	STRONG evidence directly supports the claim. WEAK evidence is only related to the topic.
Check for understanding	Claim: Marco misses his grandpa. Which evidence is strongest? Answer: (C) Mom pressed the newspaper to her chest and walked away without a word.

Step 3 (3 min): Introduce evidence

Teach	Introduce every quote with a phrase: "The text states...", "For example...", "According to paragraph 3..." Then explain it: "This shows..."
Interactive tool	Board and notes
Students do	Write one sentence: "According to the text, ____, which shows ____."
Turn and talk	Why is it not enough to drop a quote into your answer?
Worksheet Part 7A	Introduce evidence with phrases like "THE TEXT STATES" and explain it with "THIS SHOWS."
Check for understanding	Which is the best way to add evidence? Answer: (B) According to the text, "she smiled for the first time all day," which shows she felt welcomed.

Step 4 (3 min): Theme develops

Teach	A theme develops across the story. Track what the character learns, how they change, and what the title or ending suggests.
Interactive tool	Board and notes
Students do	Make a beginning / middle / end chart for a character you know.
Turn and talk	How can a story's ending help you figure out its theme?
Worksheet Part 8A	Track how the character CHANGES to find the THEME.
Check for understanding	Which best helps you find a theme? Answer: (C) How the main character changes

I do: worked example (shown one step at a time)

1. Inference: Marcus is nervous about the game.
2. Evidence A: "The game started at 7:00."
3. Evidence B: "Marcus retied his shoes for the fourth time."
4. Step 1: Does A show nervousness? No. It is about the game but proves nothing about Marcus.
5. Step 2: B shows a nervous habit. B is the strongest evidence.

What to say on every slide is in the presenter script PDF.

We do: guided practice

Text: "Maya stared at her untouched lunch and kept checking the door." Make an inference and support it.

1. Text clues: untouched lunch, checking the door.
2. What I know: people who are worried or waiting lose their appetite and watch for someone.
3. Inference: Maya is nervous or waiting for someone.
4. Evidence sentence: The text states she "kept checking the door," which shows she is anxious.

Answer: Maya is nervous or waiting for someone.

You do: independent check (2 min)

Claim: Leo is kind. Which evidence is STRONGEST? (A) "Leo was in science class." (B) "It was lunchtime." (C) "Leo had a backpack." (D) "He slid his pretzels to the middle of the table for her."

Answer: (D) "He slid his pretzels to the middle of the table for her.". Students who miss it: 3-minute reteach at the teacher table, then start the room at the Explorer level.

Misconception: "An inference is a guess." It is a conclusion based on evidence.

Misconception: "Any quote about the topic works as evidence." Evidence must support the specific claim.

Misconception: "The theme is stated in the last sentence." Themes are usually developed across the whole text.

3. QUEST: CHARACTER QUEST: HOW THEMES GROW

0:20–0:48 · 28 min

Launch: project the start screen, read the story aloud, and assign mission levels (Explorer = extra support, Agent = on level, Legend = challenge). Students can open Supports any time for read-aloud, bigger text, a word bank, and a scratch pad.

- Levels unlock in order, like a video game. Celebrate "level-ups" out loud to keep energy high.
- Students who finish early can replay and aim for 100% first-try accuracy, which is shown on their certificate.
- If a student is stuck on a level, pair them with someone who has already cleared it to explain without giving the answer.

Students turn in: the completion code plus their copied "turn in your work" block (Canvas Text Entry).

4. DEBRIEF

0:48–0:52 · 4 min

1. What made a piece of evidence "strongest" today?
2. How is an inference different from a guess?
3. Which detail in the activity best revealed a theme?

Close the loop: return to warm-up question 3. Answer: Examples: "The text states...", "According to the author...", "For example..."

5. EXIT TICKET

0:52–1:00 · 8 min

Print the exit ticket PDF (page 2 is the key and mastery guide). Every item requires evidence: Part A asks students to justify each choice, Part B asks for an explanation, and Part C applies the standard to a new situation using RACE. Sort results into Mastered, Approaching, and Beginning to plan tomorrow's groups.

LESSON RESOURCES

Resource	How it fits the lesson
Warm-up worksheet (PDF)	Optional standalone warm-up (also Part 2 of the lesson worksheet), with a key.
Mini-lesson presenter	Projectable, step-by-step interactive lesson with tools and quick checks (room page).
Lesson worksheet (PDF + key)	One printable packet students complete during the whole lesson: short fill-ins and quick checks in 13 small parts that match the presenter slides.
Character Quest: How Themes Grow (.html)	The quest for Canvas, with differentiated levels, supports, and a turn-in.
Exit ticket (PDF + key)	Evidence-based check with a rubric and a mastery sorting guide.
CommonLit (extra)	Grade 6 short stories with evidence-based questions. https://www.commonlit.org/
ReadWorks (extra)	Fiction passages and paired texts. https://www.readworks.org/
ReadWriteThink (extra)	Inference and citing evidence lessons. https://www.readwritethink.org/
Khan Academy: Reading & Vocabulary (extra)	Grade 6 reading practice. https://www.khanacademy.org/ela

ANSWER KEY: CHARACTER QUEST: HOW THEMES GROW

Level 1: The Plan (code piece: G)

1. What can you infer about Elena from the purple-marker schedule? -> She is organized and determined
2. Which detail reveals a possible weakness that the story may develop? -> "Partners just slow you down"
3. Where on the plot diagram does this part of the story belong? -> Tap Exposition

Level 2: The Problem (code piece: R)

1. How does Elena respond to her challenge at this point? -> She refuses help and tries to do it all alone
2. What does the word "snapped" suggest about Elena's feelings? -> She is frustrated and defensive
3. Where does this part of the story belong on the plot diagram? -> Tap Rising action

Level 3: The Turning Point (code piece: O)

1. Why is this the turning point of the story? -> Elena finally chooses to accept help
2. What does "Her face burned" show? -> Asking for help is embarrassing and hard for her
3. What does Sam's grin suggest about him? -> He is happy to help and not holding a grudge
4. Elena asks Sam for help. Tap where this belongs on the plot diagram. -> Tap Climax (turning point)

Level 4: The Fair (code piece: W)

1. How has Elena changed? -> She now values teamwork and accepting help
2. What does "wrote two names instead of one" symbolize? -> She plans to work with a partner next year

3. Elena writes two names on next year's calendar. Tap where this belongs on the plot diagram. -> Tap Resolution
Level 5: The Theme Tree (code piece: S)

1. Which theme is best supported by the whole story? -> Accepting help from others is a strength, not a weakness

2. Put these theme-building details in the order they appear. -> "Partners just slow you down" -> "I've got it," Elena snapped. -> "Is your uncle's offer still open?" -> Sam stepped forward to finish the explanation -> She wrote two names instead of one

3. Which quotes directly support the theme? -> Supports the theme: "Is your uncle's offer still open?", wrote two names instead of one, "My partner's uncle explained that part" | Does not support the theme: The first test was a disaster., They won second place.

4. What theme does the story develop through the way Elena changes? Cite evidence from two different parts of the story. -> Written response (RACE). Model: The story develops a theme through the way Elena changes. The theme is that accepting help from others can make us stronger than working alone. At the start Elena says, "Partners just slow you down," but at the end she "wrote two names instead of one." This shows Elena learned that teamwork helped her succeed, because Sam's help fixed her filter. Her change from refusing help to planning with a partner is how the author builds the theme.

Final code: GROWS