ENGLISH, LITERACY, AND COMMUNICATION

Theme versus main idea

Difficulty level: Advanced

English, Literacy, and Communication

This document was made by AI and there may be mistakes. If a question or answer looks wrong, use the Flag a mistake button to let Brett know so he can fix it.

Overview of the concept

This is how you tell what a story is about apart from the deeper message it teaches, like knowing a book is about a race and its lesson is about never giving up. The main idea is what happens, the plot and the events you could retell in a few sentences. The theme is the message underneath, what the story is really saying about life. Knowing the difference lets you talk about a book properly, instead of mixing up the story with its lesson.



© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q Which is the theme? Story: A girl keeps trying after failing, and finally succeeds. Main idea: A girl learns to ride a bike.

SOLUTION

The main idea says what happens: a girl learns to ride a bike.

The deeper message, shown by her persistence, is broader than the story.

So the theme is: persistence leads to success.

EXAMPLE 2

Q Which is the main idea? Story: A boy shares his lunch, and others share with him. Theme: Kindness is repaid.

SOLUTION

The theme is the lesson: kindness is repaid.

The main idea is what happens in the story itself.

So the main idea is: A boy shares his lunch and others share with him.

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

Practice questions

1 **Which is the theme? Story: A boy keeps practising after failing, and finally wins the race.**

- **A** Practice leads to success
- **B** A boy learns to run fast
- **C** A boy wins a race

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

2 **Story about a liar who is not believed when he tells the truth. Theme or main idea: Honesty matters?**

- **A** Theme
- **B** Main idea

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

3 **Which is the main idea? Story: A girl helps her elderly neighbour carry heavy bags of groceries home after school, and the neighbour thanks her warmly.**

- A A girl helps her neighbour carry groceries home.
- B Helping others brings joy.
- C A girl walks home from school.

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

4 **Story about a liar who is not believed. Main idea or theme: A boy lies and is not believed?**

- A Theme
- B Main idea

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

5 **Which is the theme? Story: A man lies again and again, and no one believes him when he tells the truth.**

- **A** Honesty matters
- **B** A man lies and is not believed
- **C** A man tells the truth once

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

6 **Which is the main idea? Story: Two friends help each other move house after a storm.**

- **A** Two friends help each other move house
- **B** Friendship helps us through hardship
- **C** A storm damages a house

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

7 **Story about greed leading to loss. Greed leads to loss. Theme or main idea?**

- A Main idea
- B Theme

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

8 **Which is the theme? Story: A king keeps taking more gold and loses it all.**

- A Greed leads to loss
- B A king loses his gold
- C Kings live in castles

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

9 **Story about a greedy king losing his gold. A king loses his gold. Theme or main idea?**

A Main idea

B Theme

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

10 **Which is the main idea? Story: A student fails a test, studies hard, and passes the next one.**

A A student passes after studying

B Mistakes teach us

C A student fails a test

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

ANSWER KEY

1. Practice leads to success
2. Theme
3. A girl helps her neighbour carry groceries home.
4. Main idea
5. Honesty matters
6. Two friends help each other move house
7. Theme
8. Greed leads to loss
9. Main idea
10. A student passes after studying

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.