

# **7 Themes, Patterns, and Symbols**

*Read It, Write It, Tell It Episode: "Neil Armstrong"*

## **Lesson Overview**

The purpose of the lessons in this unit is to help Ohio students in grades 3-7 learn the characteristics of the literary text THEME indicators that they must master for their respective Ohio achievement tests. Special care has been taken to dovetail the lessons with the indicators and the types of questions commonly asked on Ohio tests. The lessons are divided into two sections: Grades 3-4 and Grades 5-7.

## **Ohio Academic Content Indicators**

2001.EL.S05.GKG-03.BE.L03.I06 Identify stated and implied themes.

2001.EL.S05.G04-07.BE.L04.I05 Determine the theme and whether it is implied or stated directly.

## **Ohio Achievement/Proficiency Tests Theme Question Types**

- What would be another good title for this selection?
- What is the theme of this selection?

## **Neil Armstrong**

### **Episode Overview**

The episode begins when Neil Armstrong was a Boy Scout exploring near his home with friends. The majority of the episode is a tall tale where Neil meets supernatural characters and props. He uses his new companions to save his hometown from a fire.

#### Fact:

- Neil Armstrong (1930- ) lived in Ohio when he was a child and he earned the rank of Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts of America organization.
- He was an astronaut and the first human being to walk on the moon.
- Neil hiked with friends as a boy.

#### Fiction:

- Neil's scout group was "old time". The scout troop Neil joined in Upper Sandusky, Ohio was newly formed. It was established during World War II by the Boy Scouts as part of their nationwide effort to support the United States. Wartime scouts helped by conducting scrap drives, wastepaper collections, providing messenger services, and many other special jobs. They collected almost two billion pounds of metal, rubber, and other materials for the war effort and sold more than \$1.957 billion in war bonds.
- Neil thought about traveling to the moon some day. Neil was interested in flying airplanes. Armstrong, himself, debunks an often repeated story of childhood days spent using a neighbor's telescope to study the stars.

#### Tall Tale:

- In the tall tale portion of the episode a fog carries Neil away from his friends. He meets an ancient Indian Chief who gives him a "destiny staff" walking stick. The chief disappears but the staff

## Theme

protects Neil as he journeys on. A giant eagle appears and the staff and the eagle help Neil spot a forest fire heading for his hometown. As the eagle carries him into the sky Neil sees the moon and thinks about going there one day. The eagle leaves Neil in town. Neil sees that the townspeople are losing the fight against the fire and that more water is needed. The destiny staff helps Neil summon the eagle who then carries troughs of water to put out the fire. The town is saved and young Neil is honored.

### Vocabulary

The following words used by the storyteller in the *Read It, Write It, Tell It* episode “Neil Armstrong” may be unfamiliar to some students.

adventurous  
ancient  
challenge  
civilian  
cliff  
destined  
destiny

douse  
drench  
exclaimed  
fanged  
incredible  
majestically

prepared  
pulsated  
scenery  
serpent  
soar  
spirit  
troughs

# Themes List

## (Quotations, Mottos, Proverbs and Old Sayings)

### **Prejudice**

- Things are not always as they appear.
- Things are usually not as bad as you think they will be.
- Look for the golden lining.
- Beauty is only skin deep.
- Prejudice leads to: wrong conclusions, violence, false perceptions, a vicious cycle, oppression.
  - Don't judge a book by its cover.
  - Mercy triumphs over judgment.
- Beware of strangers.
- People from other cultures are really very much like us.
- Look before you leap.

### **Belief**

- Believe in yourself. To succeed, we must first believe that we can.
- Believe one who has proved it. Believe an expert.
- The thing always happens that you really believe in; and the belief in a thing makes it happen.
- One needs something to believe in, something for which one can have whole-hearted enthusiasm.
- As long as people believe in absurdities, they will continue to commit atrocities.
- Moral skepticism can result in distance, coldness, and cruelty.

### **Change**

- People are afraid of change but things always change.
- Things are usually not as bad as you think they will be.
- Knowledge can help us prepare for the future.
- Forewarned is forearmed.
- It is impossible to be certain about things.

### **Good and Evil**

- Good triumphs over evil.
- Evil is punished and good is rewarded.
- Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- Bullies can be overcome.
- Good manners have positive results.
- Greed leads to negative outcomes: suffering, disaster, catastrophe, evil, callousness, arrogance, megalomania.
- It is possible to survive against all odds.
- Jealousy leads to negative outcomes: guilt, resentment, loneliness, violence, madness.
- Good and evil coexist.

### **Love**

- Treat others as you want to be treated.
- Act kindly without seeking ultimate reasons. Practice random acts of kindness.
- Love is blind.
- Love triumphs over all: hate, selfishness, cruelty, tragedy, death
- Love one another.
- Love your neighbor.
- Non-human animals are beings with rights that deserve protection.

## **Love (continued)**

- Friends are a person's most valuable possession.
- Blood is thicker than water.
- When in love, one must suffer.
- Love is a force for happiness and fulfillment.
- One should be willing to sacrifice for the person one loves.

## **Politics**

- Follow the rules.
- Our system of government is better than other systems.
- Our system of government would be better if we would change.
- Rules are there to protect and help us.
- Personal freedoms, like those listed in the United States Bill of Rights, are good and necessary.
- Personal freedoms have gone too far and must be curtailed.
- Freedom cannot exist without personal responsibility.
- Freedom is worth fighting (or dying) for.
- Peace is worth fighting (or dying) for.
- Our system of government is worth fighting (or dying) for.

## **Growing up**

- Growing up is a great time of life.
- Growing up is a challenge for everyone.
- It takes a village to raise a child.
- It takes a family to raise a child.
- Good communication between generations leads to: satisfaction, understanding, better relationships, cooperation.

## **Ambition**

- Too much ambition leads negative results: self-destruction, envy, greed, neurosis, downfall.
- One needs ambition in order to succeed.
- Hard work can bring a great reward.
- We grow small trying to be great.
- Goals are dreams we convert to plans and take action to fulfill.

## **Courage and Fear**

- Understanding feelings of cowardice.
- Accepting a challenge leads to positive results.
- One can be courageous and cowardly at the same time.
- Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.
- Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear.
- Face your fears.
- Where fear is present, wisdom cannot be.
- I have not ceased being fearful, but I have ceased to let fear control me.

## **Intentions**

- Actions speak louder than words.
- It's not the gift that counts.
- Don't cry over spilled milk.
- It is difficult to say who does you the most harm: enemies with the worst intentions or friends with the best.

## **Knowledge**

- Knowledge is power.
- Ignorance is bliss.
- Ignorance is never better than knowledge.
- If you have knowledge, use it to help others.
- Know your enemy.
- Too much learning is a dangerous thing.
- Be curious always! For knowledge will not acquire you: you must acquire it.

## **Perseverance**

- Never give up.
- Try, try again.
- When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.
- The race is not always to the swift, but to those who keep on running.
- To protect those who are not able to protect themselves is a duty which every one owes to society.
- It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.
- Our duty is to be useful, not according to our desires, but according to our powers.

## **Happiness**

- Enjoy life while you can.
- Happiness is not having what you want. It is wanting what you have.
- Happiness is not a station you arrive at, but a manner of traveling.
- The Grand essentials of happiness are: something to do, something to love, and something to hope for.
- Happiness depends upon ourselves.
- To ease another's heartache is to forget one's own.

## **Truth**

- You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time.
- Believe those who are seeking the truth; doubt those who find it.
- Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts.
- Nothing is easier than self-deceit. For what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true.
- The truth which has made us free will in the end make us glad also.
- Falsehood is easy, truth so difficult.
- Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!

## **2** Before Viewing

- Ask the students to raise their hands if they ever spent time exploring their neighborhood, community, or other area of their environments.
- Ask the students to imagine how they would react if something totally unexpected had occurred during one of their adventures? For example:
  - An olive green, wool blanket large enough to cover a football field suddenly fell from the sky and landed in a heap just in front of you.
  - A gigantic blue flying saucer settled to the ground just 50 feet ahead of you.
  - 200 chickens suddenly appeared; saw you and all began walking slowly toward you.
- Ask the students if they would continue to explore when faced by the unexpected.
- Ask the students how they think U. S. astronaut Neil Armstrong would react when faced with the unexpected.

## **3** After Viewing

Pre/Post Questions: If the students cannot easily answer the following questions, you may wish to use the Lessons (Section 4) and/or the Extensions (Section 5) about themes, patterns, and symbols.

1. What was Neil Armstrong doing just before the fog carried him away?  
*Neil was hiking in the woods behind his house with his friends.*
2. Do you think Neil expected to be carried away?  
*No. There is no evidence in the episode that would lead the viewer to think that Neil was expecting anything unusual to occur.*
3. Do you think Neil expected to be challenged by the ancient Indian Chief?  
*No. There is no evidence in the episode that would lead the viewer to think that Neil was expecting a challenge.*
4. How did Neil react to the ancient Indian Chief's challenge?  
*Neil tells the ancient Indian Chief that he accepts the challenge.*
5. List two challenges Neil faced in the episode and explain how Neil reacted to each of them. Use evidence from the story to support your answers.
  - *A snake tries to bite Neil. Neil was forewarned by the walking staff and moved swiftly to the side when he saw the snake.*
  - *A forest fire threatens the town. Neil jumped off a cliff so the eagle could catch him and carry him to town to warn the sheriff.*
  - *The fire cannot be put out by the citizens of the town. Neil calls on the eagle to come and help put out the fire.*
6. Did Neil run away from challenges?  
*No, Neil accepts the challenges and in the end, he saves his town.*
7. Which of the following would be a title that best shows the theme of the Neil Armstrong episode?
  - Neil Armstrong Meets an Ancient Indian
  - Neil Armstrong and the Friendly Giant Eagle
  - Neil Armstrong Accepts Challenges
  - Fire in the Valley

*The title that best represents the theme is "Neil Armstrong Accepts Challenges"*

## **4** Lesson

### Materials:

- Examples of Aesop’s fables. See #2 below for ideas and suggestions.
- List of themes. See the “Themes List” above or create your own list.
- Student Handout “Marika and the Bully”
- Student Handout “Using Theme in a Story”

### Procedure:

1. Provide the students with a definition of theme that they can understand. For example:
  - *The theme of a story is the lesson, truth or understanding about the nature of human beings that the author thinks readers or viewers can use to make their own lives better.*
2. Share one or more of Aesop’s fables and lead the children to discuss how the moral of the story could be applied in their own lives.
  - Suggested fables:
    - The Dog in the Manger: “People often resent others enjoying what they cannot enjoy themselves.”
    - The Boy Who Cried Wolf (also known as The Shepherd’s Boy and the Wolf): “Nobody believes a liar...even when he is telling the truth!”
    - The Fox and the Grapes (also known as: Sour Grapes): “It’s easy to despise what you cannot have.”
    - The Hare and the Tortoise (also known as The Tortoise and the Hare): “Don’t brag about your lightning pace, for Slow and Steady won the race!”
  - Aesop’s Fable Directories:
    - <http://www.storyarts.org/library/aesops/index.html>
    - <http://www.umass.edu/aesop/fables.php>
3. Provide the students with a list of themes and ask them choose one. See the “Theme’s List” included in this unit. Some examples include:
  - Accepting a challenge leads to positive results.
  - Good triumphs over evil.
  - Growing up is wonderful and should be enjoyed.
  - Growing up is full of challenges well worth taking on.
  - Our futures are built by our dreams.
  - Making things better for others/another (people or animals) benefits both you and the others.
4. Display or give the students the handout “Marika and the Bully” so that they may see the elements of a theme-based story planning framework.
5. Give the students the handout “Using Theme in a Story” to use as a tool to help them create a theme-based story. Explain that they may simply refer to the framework, write notes on it, or fill it out completely as part of their prewriting, organizing stage.
6. Have the students compose a theme-based story.
7. Evaluate the writing with a holistic-writing rubric such as:
  - Ohio Department of Education: Grade 4: Downloadable PDF file:  
<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/DocumentManagement/DocumentDownload.aspx?DocumentID=9862>
  - <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/frameworks/langarts/42tools.htm#holisticwritingassessment>
  - [http://www.fcps.edu/DIS/OHSICS/forlang/PALS/rubrics/2wrt\\_hol.htm](http://www.fcps.edu/DIS/OHSICS/forlang/PALS/rubrics/2wrt_hol.htm)

# Using Theme in a Story

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

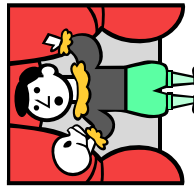


**Theme:** Write the idea, lesson, or statement of truth that you wish others to learn.

## Theme

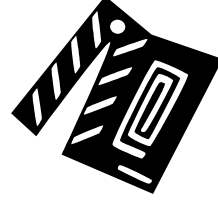


Write the event that will teach the main character (or the audience) the lesson of your theme.



**Main Characters:** Name your characters and describe each one's usual behavior.

**Plot:** Write what happens before the main character (or the audience) learns the lesson.



**Plot:** Write what happens after the main character (or the audience) learns the lesson.

## Theme Example: Marika and the Bully

### Theme



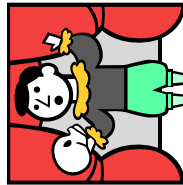
**Theme: Write the idea, lesson, or statement of truth that you wish others to learn.**

**People working together are stronger than a bully.**

Marika carries out the students' plan. She whistles the special whistle that calls all of the Bully Boycotters to form a giant circle around Brutus the Bully and his two helpers.



**Write the event that will teach the main character (or the audience) the lesson of your theme.**



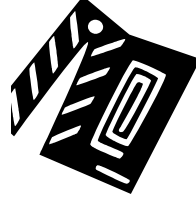
**Main Characters: Name your characters and describe each one's usual behavior.**

- Brutus the Bully: mean to everyone, even his friends.
- Marika: friendly to everyone but kind of scared of most people.
- Mervin: doesn't seem to notice other people very much, always thinking about math problems.
- Merilee: always talking, has many friends.
- Markus: always playing sports, has many friends.
- Mandee: shy, always reading.
- Mindie: always fixing her hair, knows what to wear.
- Mr. Magnuson: the custodian, always helping others
- Brash and Buggy: always hanging around Bill and acting mean.

Marika is bullied by Brutus and his friends. Mandee finds Marika crying and learns why. Mandee tells Mr. Magnuson and he tells Mandee how he and his friends overcame a bully years ago. Mandee likes the plan but knows that others must join her in making the plan work. Mandee tells Mervin. Mervin and Mandee get Markus to help. Markus works out a special whistle and starts teaching others. Mindie and Merilee want to be part of what Markus is doing and join the others. Mervin works out a plan for what the kids will do once everyone comes together and shares it with everyone. Mandee helps Merilee learn to keep the plan a secret.

Brash and Buggy run away but Bill cannot get out of the circle of students. Marika, with Markus on one side and Mandee and Mervin on the other, tells Bill how things are going to be from now on.

**Plot: Write what happens before the main character (or the audience) learns the lesson.**



**Plot: Write what happens after the main character (or the audience) learns the lesson.**

## **5** *Extension Activities*

### **Theme, Pattern, and Symbol • Activities**

- Conduct a debate centered around possible themes for the story.
- Design a poster to advertise the theme of the story.
- Write an original story with the same theme of a given story.
- Write, tell or show how the theme of the story would be different if another character was the main focus of the story.
- Research current trends and/or opinions in the United States for the story’s theme.

### **Theme • Online Resources**

#### **Online Sources of Quotations**

- The Quotations Page: <http://www.quotedb.com/>
- Famous Quotes: <http://famous-quotes.ws/>
- Wisdom Quotes: <http://www.wisdomquotes.com/>
- Quotations: <http://quotations.about.com/>
- Business Quotes by Business Leaders: [http://www.woopidoo.com/business\\_quotes/index.htm](http://www.woopidoo.com/business_quotes/index.htm)
- The Quote Cache: <http://quotes.prolix.nu/>
- Quote DB: <http://www.quotedb.com/>

#### **Read • Write • Think**

- <http://www.readwritethink.org>
- ReadWriteThink, established in April of 2002, is a partnership between the International Reading Association (IRA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the Verizon Foundation.

“Writing ABC Books to Enhance Reading Comprehension,” Grades 3-5

- [http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=392](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=392)
- In this lesson, students will use an online interactive, the Alphabet Organizer, to think critically about a piece of literature. Using the alphabet as an organizing structure, students will analyze literary elements in the story, such as characters, setting, and themes, organizing their observations in an alphabet book.

“Creating Classroom Community by Crafting Themed Poetry Collections,” Grades 3-5

- [http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=391](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=391)
- Back to school means new teachers, new classmates and many unanswered questions. In this lesson, students create poetry collections with a back-to-school theme of “getting to know each other.”

“Literature as a Catalyst for Social Action: Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges,” Grades 3-5

- [http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=105](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=105)
- Picture books are used to invite students to engage in critical discussion of complex issues of race, class, and gender.

“Flying to Freedom: *Tar Beach* and *The People Could Fly*,” Grades 3-5

- [http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=32](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=32)
- Comparing the award-winning books *Tar Beach* and *The People Could Fly* enables students to interpret themes of liberation and racism in a complex, multifaceted manner.

“Book Report Alternative: Comic Strips and Cartoon Squares,” Grades 6-8

- [http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=195](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=195)
- Students tire of responding to novels in the same ways. They want new ways to think about a work of literature and new ways to dig into it. By creating comic strips or cartoon squares featuring characters in books, they're encouraged to think analytically about the characters, events, and themes they've explored in ways that expand their critical thinking by focusing on crystallizing the significant points of the book in a few short scenes.

“Doodle Splash: Using Graphics to Discuss Literature,” Grades 6-8

- [http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=190](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=190)
- Taking advantage of students' natural tendency to doodle, students keep a doodle journal while reading short stories by a common author. In small groups, students combine their doodles into a graphic representation of the text that they present to the class while discussing their story. Students also do individual graphics and, ultimately, write group essays analyzing the author's themes.

## Ohio Instructional Management System

- <https://ims.ode.state.oh.us>. Use the IMS Quick Search:
- Chose ☉ Lesson Plans, Content Area: English – Reading ▼, Grade Level: as desired ▼, Keyword: type theme. Click Search.

“Descriptive Language and Theme - Grade Three,” English Language Arts > Reading > Literary Text

- Students tune their ears to listen for and appreciate descriptive language within texts. They identify and synthesize description and consider how it shows, supports or enhances an author's intended message.

“Seeing Themes in Young Adult Literature - Grade Seven,” English Language Arts > Reading > Literary Text

- The lesson teaches/reviews the concept of theme. Students then explore common themes found in literature dealing with issues of adolescence. In the Post Assessment, students respond to a series of self-selected readings by identifying themes and the details which support and develop them. A mandatory extension activity allows students to respond to their reading and discussion with either a comparison paper or an open-ended original creation.

## Neil Armstrong • Follow up Activities

### Figurative Language from the Neil Armstrong Episode

- Neil and his friends' walking sticks had a compass on top, 50 feet of corded rope wrapped around it and every fishing lure known to man hooked on the sides for a complete survival kit.
- A giant eagle carries Neil to touch the moon and carries water troughs to save the town.
- Shifting fog lifted Neil up away from his friends.
- The magic walking staff warns Neil of a snake on the trail, [it] pulsates, and [its] carvings shift.

### Research Ideas

- Armstrong is flown about by a giant eagle in the episode. What does this bird have to do with Armstrong's real life?
- Did Armstrong ever touch the moon?
- What does Ohio look like where Neil Armstrong grew up? Does it have hills as mentioned in the episode?
- What is an Eagle Scout? Can girls become Eagle Scouts, too?