

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.

Ohio Academic Content Indicators

2001.EL.S05.G04-07.BE.L05.I05	Summarize stated and implied themes.
2001.EL.S05.G04-07.BE.L06.I05	Identify recurring themes, patterns and symbols found in literature from different eras and cultures.
2001.EL.S05.G04-07.BE.G07.I05	Identify recurring themes, patterns and symbols found in literature from different eras and cultures.

Ohio Achievement/Proficiency Tests Theme Question Types

- What would be another good title for this selection?
- What is the theme of this selection?
- The selection focuses on which theme?
- Where is there a major contrast in the selection?
- Identify an example of a word or phrase that is repeated in the selection and explain why the author makes this repetition.
- What does (a given theme/action/pattern) from the selection symbolize?

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.

Theme

- 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 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.

- 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!

Before Viewing

- Ask the students to interpret a moral from one of Aesop’s fables. The following examples are from the several hundred fables from an early translation of Aesop’s works for which the full text is available at the University of Virginia’s eText Center:
<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/AesFabl.html>:
 - The Dog in the Manger: "People often grudge others what they cannot enjoy themselves.."
 - The Ant and the Grasshopper: "It is best to prepare for the days of necessity."
 - The Bundle of Sticks (Original title: The Father and His Sons): "Union Gives Strength" (Original closing: "My sons, if you are of one mind, and unite to assist each other, you will be as this faggot (bundle of sticks, twigs, or branches bound together), uninjured by all the attempts of your enemies; but if you are divided among yourselves, you will be broken as easily as these sticks.")
- You can also find Aesop’s fables at the University of Massachusetts’ education department:
<http://www.umass.edu/aesop/fables.php> or
- Ask the students to give a motto, moral, idea or saying that they have heard and believe to be helpful in their own lives.
- Ask the students to tune in the *Read It, Write It, Tell It* “Neil Armstrong” episode to see if they can identify an understanding, lesson, or statement of truth that they could apply to their own lives.

After Viewing

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

1. Identify an example of a word or phrase that is repeated in the episode.
Destiny
2. Define destiny?
Destiny may be defined as a fixed timeline of events that is inevitable and unchangeable. Many people believe that the future is already chosen or set by a force or forces outside of personal determination. Others believe that they choose their own destiny by choosing different paths throughout their life.
3. Do you believe that you have a destiny?
Answers will vary.
4. Why does the storyteller have Neil Armstrong accept the destiny staff?
Answers will vary. Accept reasonable responses. Students may feel that the storyteller (J. D. Williamson) wanted to express the idea that one may choose to either accept or reject the idea of destiny. They may feel that the storyteller wanted viewers to see that by accepting or recognizing ones destiny, one will be able to meet the challenges of ones future.
5. What does the giant eagle symbol stand for?
Answers will vary. Accept reasonable responses that students can support. Some students may feel that the giant eagle stands for the space module – the Eagle – that separated from the Apollo spacecraft and landed Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldren on the moon in July, 1969. Some may feel that the giant eagle represents Armstrong’s destiny – the journey to the moon. Some may feel that the eagle represents a spiritual entity that will help Armstrong realize his personal destiny.

6. What is the theme of the Neil Armstrong episode? Support your answer with evidence from the episode.
- *Answers will vary. Accept answers that the students can support. Students may see the theme as:*
 - *Accepting challenges will lead to positive outcomes*
 - *Destiny exists – accept your destiny*
 - *Rely on spiritual helpers*
 - *Students may choose the storytellers closing words “Good friends are hard to find but well worth looking for” as the theme for the episode. His spiritual companions do help him but there is no evidence in the episode they interacted with Neil in a manner that one would expect of good friends.*

Lesson

Identifying Theme

Materials:

- Internet Access. See numbers #1, #2, and #3 below.
- Passages, poems, or short stories for which the students will identify theme. See #2 below for internet sites that make text available on line.

Procedure:

1. Remind, teach or have the students research the definition of theme and its purpose in literary text:
 - One word themes are not usually enough. Example: A student might identify a theme as "freedom". That is not specific. It may mean, "Personal freedoms, like those listed in the United States Bill of Rights, are good and necessary." It may also mean, "Personal freedoms have gone too far and must be reduced," or "Freedom cannot exist without personal responsibility."
 - Sites that speak about the nature and purpose of theme include:
 - "Teaching Literature: Theme:" <http://members.fortunecity.com/nadabs/literature-theme.html>
 - "Theme (Literature):" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theme_\(literature\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theme_(literature))
 - "Elements of Fiction: Definition of Theme"
 - <http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/fiction/elements.asp?e=6>
 - "Theme: What does it mean?" <http://staff.fcps.net/tcarr/shortstory/plot1.htm#Theme>
 - "Literary Elements: Theme"
 - http://www.orangeusd.k12.ca.us/yorba/literary_elements.htm#THEME
2. Have the students read short stories and identify the theme(s). Use a current classroom text or download public domain text from one or more of the following sites.
 - a. <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/AesFab1.html>
 - b. <http://classics.mit.edu/Aesop/fab.1.1.html>
 - c. <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=21> Choose from text, html, or handheld computer (Palm, Microsoft) versions.
3. The following sites offer routines or methods for identifying literary themes:
 - a. "Finding the Theme" <http://www.learner.org/exhibits/literature/read/theme2.html>
 - b. "Theme" http://www.orangeusd.k12.ca.us/yorba/literary_elements.htm#THEME
 - c. "Understand Theme" PowerPoint presentation by R. Fanning
adm.uhcl.edu/School_of_Education/SoE/writing_project/demo/demo05/RFanning.ppt

Write a Theme-based Story

Materials:

- List of themes. See the “Themes List” in the introductory section of this unit or create your own list.
- Student Handout “Paulo’s Story”
- Student Handout “Theme • Story Planning Framework”
- A holistic rubric for evaluating writing. See #6 below for suggestions and ideas.

Procedure:

1. Give the students a list of theme ideas. Choose from the “Themes List” provided in this unit, create your own list, or have the students develop their own list.
2. Have the student’s choose one theme.
3. Display or give the students the handout “Paulo’s Story” so that they may see the elements of the theme story planning framework.
4. Give the students the handout “Theme • Story Planning Framework” 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.
5. Have the students compose a theme-based story.
6. 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>.
 - Ohio Department of Education: Grade 7: Downloadable PDF file:
<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/DocumentManagement/DocumentDownload.aspx?DocumentID=17518>.
 - <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/frameworks/langarts/42tools.htm#holisticwritingassessment>
 - http://www.fcps.edu/DIS/OHSICS/forlang/PALS/rubrics/2wrt_hol.htm

Theme • Story Planning Framework

Your story's characters may be human or anything that has the actions and feelings that humans have. Think about how you will have the main character learn the lesson that your theme teaches.

Name: _____		Date: _____	
Theme:			
Past, Present, or Future:			
Location:			
Environment:			
Main Character:			
Main Character's behavior at the beginning of the story and at the end:			
Helper for Main Character (if any):			
Character that makes things more difficult (if any):			
Nature's Role (if any):			
What event will teach the main character (or the audience) the lesson of your theme?			
What other events will happen as story takes place?			

Theme Story Planning Example: Paulo's Story

Your story's characters may be human or anything that has the actions and feelings that humans have. Think about how you will have the main character learn the lesson that your theme teaches.

Name:	Jim Smithson	Date:	October 30th
Theme:	Our futures are built by our dreams.		
Past, Present, or Future:	This story will take place in the past - a few years ago.		
Location:	Los Angeles, California		
Environment:	A part of town where the buildings are falling down, the streets are filled with trash, and life is hard.		
Main Character:	Paulo		
Helper for Main Character (if any):	Paulo's mother and a man called Dom Roberto		
Main Character's behavior at the beginning of the story and at the end:	At the beginning of the story, Paulo hates everyone and gets into a lot of trouble. At the end of the story, Paulo is working hard and does not get into trouble.		
Character that makes things more difficult (if any):	No one. Paulo makes things hard for himself.		
Nature's Role (if any):	None - the weather and the climate do not matter in this story.		
What event will teach the main character (or the audience) the lesson of your theme?	On the day that Paulo passes his Judo tests and gets his Goyku (yellow belt), he will finally understand that he has changed and that he now has a dream. He will tell his close friends and his family his dream of being the best Judoko to ever come from his part of Los Angeles.		
What other events will happen as story takes place?	He will get in trouble at school. He will be mean to other people. He will get in trouble on the streets. His mother will try to talk to him but Paulo won't listen. His mother will find a free Judo club and take Paulo to join the club. Dom Roberto will be a helper for Paulo and show him not only how to do the Judo moves but also how a person can help others and be a leader - even if you don't have a lot of money.		

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.

Themes, Patterns and Symbols • Internet 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
- 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
- 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
- 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
- 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
- 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
- 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
- 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 Examples

- 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?