

Finding the Theme

A **theme** is a key message or lesson in a story.

Most stories do not openly state their themes. Instead, to find the theme or central message of a story, look at the story elements to make an inference.

Ask yourself questions to help you find the theme.

- What are the important events in the story?
- How did they grow or change?
- Why did the characters act the way they did?
- What did they learn?



Then, think about how the characters' lesson applies to the world. The story might suggest something about people, or the world, in general. It also might give a lesson you can use in your own life. Remember, a theme is not a summary or a message specific to only one story.

Read the passage, and then answer the questions that follow.

An Unlikely Friend

Finn sighed, dreading what came after recess. *Reading group is the worst part of the day*, he thought.

Finn was not happy that Jake was his reading partner. School had only started two weeks ago, and Jake had made Finn feel bad about himself over and over again. Jake made fun of Finn's glasses, his blue shoes, and the way he read aloud. Finn told Mrs. Nelson, his teacher, about the rude interactions in hopes of switching reading partners. Unfortunately, Mrs. Nelson told Finn that Jake would remain his partner throughout the realistic fiction unit.

His stomach in knots as he thought about working with Jake, Finn avoided eye contact when they walked back into their

classroom after recess. Until, THUD! Finn's eyes darted over to the door to see that all of Jake's books had fallen out of his backpack. Jake's face turned bright red as he bent down to pick up the mess. Finn rushed over to him. Despite Jake's rude behavior lately, Finn helped Jake pick up his books.

"No worries, Jake," Finn said, with a kind half-smile. "It's hard to lug all these books around, isn't it?"

That afternoon during their reading activity, Jake was much kinder to Finn. He was cheerful when he mentioned that Finn's ideas had helped him understand the vocabulary words.

Maybe he's not so bad, after all, Finn thought, as he realized he was learning a lot from Jake, too.

1. What problem did Finn face in this story? Finn doesn't want to be Jake's reading partner because Jake has been unkind. For example, Jake made fun of Finn's appearance and the way he read aloud in class.

2. How did Finn solve the problem? The problem is solved when Finn helps Jack pick up the books that he drops in front of the entire class. Jake feels grateful and changes his behavior towards Finn.

3. Which of the following best captures the main lesson or theme of this story?

- a. Being unkind can get you in trouble.
- b. People should show kindness towards others.
- c. It's important to always be yourself.
- d. Never trust someone you don't know well.

4. What details from the text helped you determine the theme? In paragraph 2, Finn avoids eye contact with Jake, but then he sees that Jake is embarrassed. Even though Jake has been rude, Finn helps him anyway.