

Think About Theme:

The Golden Nugget

In literature, the *theme* is the main idea or moral of a story. Typically, the theme of a story conveys a message or lesson about life. The theme is generally not stated outright, but rather represented by the story's characters and their actions, as well as symbols and motifs.

Directions: Read the story, then answer the questions that follow.



Once upon a time many, many years ago, there lived in China two friends named Ki-wu and Pao-shu. These two young men were always together. No cross words passed between them; no unkind thoughts marred their friendship.

It was a bright beautiful day in early spring when Ki-wu and Pao-shu set out for a stroll together, for they were tired of the city and its noises. "Let us go into the heart of the pine forest," said Ki-wu lightly. "There we can forget the cares that worry us; there we can breathe the sweetness of the flowers and lie on the moss-covered ground."

"Good!" said Pao-shu, "I, too, am tired. The forest is the place for rest." For many an hour they rambled on, talking and laughing merrily; when suddenly on passing round a clump of flower-covered bushes, they saw shining in the pathway directly in front of them a lump of gold. "Look!" said both, speaking at the same time, and pointing toward the treasure.

Ki-wu, stooping, picked up the nugget. It was nearly as large as a lemon, and was very pretty. "It is yours, my dear friend," said he, at the same time handing it to Pao-shu; "yours because you saw it first."

"No, no," answered Pao-shu, "you are wrong, my brother, for you were first to speak." Thus they joked for some minutes, each refusing to take the treasure for himself; each insisting that it belonged to the other. At last, the chunk of gold was dropped in the very spot where they had first spied it, and the two comrades went away, each happy because he loved his friend better than anything else in the world. Thus they turned their backs on any chance of quarrelling.

"It was not for gold that we left the city," exclaimed Ki-wu warmly.

"No," replied his friend, "One day in this forest is worth a thousand nuggets."

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When they reached the spring they were sorry to find the place already occupied. A countryman was stretched at full length on the ground. "Wake up, fellow!" cried Pao-shu, "there is money for you near by. Up yonder path a golden apple is waiting for some man to go and pick it up." Then they described to the stranger the exact spot where the treasure was, and were delighted to see him set out in eager search.

For an hour they enjoyed each other's company, talking of all the hopes and ambitions of their future, and listening to the music of the birds that hopped about on the branches overhead. At last they were startled by the angry voice of the man who had gone after the nugget.

"What trick is this you have played on me, masters? Why do you make a poor man like me run his legs off for nothing on a hot day?"

"What do you mean, fellow?" asked Ki-wu, astonished. "Did you not find the gold we told you about?"

"No," he answered, in a tone of half-hidden rage, "but in its place a monster snake, which I cut in two with my blade."

"We thought we were doing you a favor. Come, Pao-shu, let us go back and have a look at this wonderful snake that has been hiding in a chunk of gold." Laughing merrily, the two companions left the countryman and turned back in search of the nugget.

"If I am not mistaken," said Ki-wu, "the gold lies beyond that fallen tree."

"Quite true; we shall soon see the dead snake."

Quickly they crossed the remaining stretch of pathway, with their eyes fixed intently on the ground. Arriving at the spot where they had left the shining treasure, what was their surprise to see, not the lump of gold, not the dead snake described by the idler, but, instead, two beautiful golden nuggets, each larger than the one they had seen at first.

Each friend picked up one of these treasures and handed it joyfully to his companion.

"At last the fairies have rewarded you for your unselfishness!" said Ki-wu.

"Yes," answered Pao-shu, "by granting me a chance to give you your desserts."



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Directions: Answer the questions below.

1. What moral or lesson is illustrated in the story of the golden nugget?

2. List two examples from the story that show the moral.

3. Use one word to describe the moral of the story: _____
This is the story's *theme*.

4. Describe a time that you experienced this theme in your own life.
