

Determining Theme or Central Idea

Theme: *A Time to Change*

Do you know the story of Spider-Man? After Peter Parker is bitten by a mutant spider, he mostly goofs around with his new powers. He doesn't capture criminals; in fact, he lets one go. But this bad decision teaches Peter an important lesson: With great power comes great responsibility. In other words, if you're Spider-Man, you owe it to the world to use your powers to help others. This is a major **theme**, or lesson, of the Spider-Man comics.

Look at the picture below. What lesson, or theme, does the picture seem to convey?



Before you can describe the theme of a picture or story, you must first understand its central idea. The **central idea** is what a picture or story is mainly about.

In the chart below, write two details from the picture that support its central idea.

Central Idea		
The boy practiced soccer every day and became the "Most Improved Player."		
Detail	Detail	Detail
Used to be worst on the team		

Based on the chart, describe a general lesson the reader might learn from the picture.

While reading, ask yourself: What lesson is the author trying to tell the reader? What details does the author use to tell it? If you can ask and answer such questions, you'll succeed in the "great responsibility" of better understanding what you read.



Read the first four paragraphs of the following story.

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Tiana’s Scar by Maria Kane

When she was five years old, Tiana was bitten by Rex, her uncle’s dog. The bite left a small scar on Tiana’s finger.

Now 11, Tiana still avoids dogs wherever she goes. Every morning, Tiana walks an extra block to school to avoid walking by her neighbor’s dog, Millie. Millie lies quietly behind a locked gate and doesn’t bark much, but Tiana insists on avoiding the dog at all costs.

When her best friend, Kim, laughed at Tiana’s extra hike one morning, Tiana exclaimed, “I don’t care what you think! Passing a ferocious beast is not how I want to start my day.”

“OK, calm down, Tiana,” Kim responded as Tiana rushed away angrily. *(continued)*

Explore how to answer this question: “What is the central idea of this part of the story?”

To find the central idea of this part of the story, underline the most important details.

In the chart below, write down the important details you find. One has been done for you. Then, use these details to find the central idea.

Central Idea		
Detail	Detail	Detail
“When she was five years old, Tiana was bitten by Rex, her uncle’s dog.”		



Close Reading

Underline important details. Find the sentence that shows Tiana is changing.

Continue reading Tiana’s story. Use the Close Reading and the Hint to help you answer the question.

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One day, Tiana’s class took a field trip to an animal shelter. The tour guide explained different types of dogs and their behaviors. Tiana asked the guide many questions and described her fear of dogs. “You should never act scared of a dog,” the guide explained. “If you walk calmly and with confidence, dogs are less likely to bark at you.” The guide demonstrated this for Tiana and her class.

Walking home from school that day, Tiana decided to be brave and give it a try. She walked confidently past Millie. At first, the dog stood up and stared, but when it saw Tiana holding her head high, it sat down quietly. Tiana felt proud—and not scared at all.

Hint

Which choice best sums up the main message of the story?

Circle the correct answer.

What sentence below best expresses a theme of this story?

- A** Knowledge can help a person overcome fears.
- B** Friends stand by you even when times are tough.
- C** Dogs only bark at people who act scared.
- D** Confidence does not help people solve problems.



Show Your Thinking

Look at the answer you chose above. Explain which details from the story helped to convey this theme.



Choose an incorrect answer. Explain to a partner why it is not a theme of the story.



Read the text. Use the Study Buddy and the Close Reading to guide your reading.



Maybe the author is giving clues about the theme by showing how the main character changes. I'm going to underline sentences that show the main character's feelings change.

Close Reading

Why does the narrator think the family trip will be boring? **Underline** the sentence that explains why the narrator is not looking forward to the trip.

What is the narrator's final opinion of Mount Rushmore as a place to see and visit? **Circle** words or phrases that describe the narrator's opinion at the end of the story.

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Rushmore

by Mark Santiago

- 1 This summer, my parents planned a trip for us to visit Mount Rushmore. Our sixth-grade class had studied Mount Rushmore, and a visit there sounded really boring. Last summer, we went to a theme park, and I went on about fifty rides. Now I was supposed to enjoy staring at a huge carved rock?
- 2 As we drove to the airport, I prepared myself for the boredom that I would have to endure over the next week. A few hours later, we landed in Rapid City, and we spent the afternoon driving through a wildlife park, where we saw all kinds of amazing creatures. I was starting to think this trip might not be a huge waste of time after all.
- 3 Seeing the animals was fascinating, but nothing could prepare me for what we saw the next day. We drove about 30 miles to Mount Rushmore. I knew that Mount Rushmore was a mountain with the faces of the presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln carved into its side. I've seen statues of famous people before. I didn't know why these would be any different, but boy did I find out!
- 4 When I saw the monument for the first time, I felt frozen in my tracks. Mount Rushmore is simply majestic. The size of the carvings is astonishing—each head is about 60 feet high! I never thought anything could top the theme park adventure I had last year, but now I know that sometimes a big rock can actually take my breath away.



Hints

Which sentence describes how the narrator initially feels about the trip to Mount Rushmore?

Think about why the narrator's feelings about the summer vacation have changed.

What aspects of the trip surprise the narrator? What can readers learn from the narrator's feelings about the trip?

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

- 1** In this story, the narrator's feelings are clues about the story's central idea. Which sentence from the story shares an important detail about the author's feelings?

 - A** "Last summer, we went to a theme park and I went on about fifty rides."
 - B** "Our sixth-grade class had studied Mount Rushmore, and a visit there sounded really boring."
 - C** "This summer, my parents planned a trip for us to visit Mount Rushmore."
 - D** "I've seen statues of famous people before."
- 2** Which of the following sentences best states a theme about human behavior as described in "Rushmore"?

 - A** People often dread situations that turn out to be fine or even fun.
 - B** What is pleasing to one person may be disappointing to another.
 - C** We should always do what we can to make the best of a difficult situation.
 - D** Memories of great times in the past can help us through boring times in the present.
- 3** Select **two** pieces of evidence from "Rushmore" that support your answer to question 2. Check the boxes of your two choices.

 - "planned a trip for us to visit Mt. Rushmore"
 - "and a visit there sounded really boring"
 - "As we drove to the airport"
 - "the size of the carvings is astonishing"
 - "We drove about 30 miles"
 - "I knew that Mt. Rushmore was a mountain with the faces of presidents"
 - "I've seen statues of famous people before."



Read the story. Then answer the questions that follow.

Vivian's Move

by Miguel Pereira

1 On a gray, rainy morning, Vivian waved goodbye to the red door she had walked through for the last time. She waved goodbye to her bus stop, which looked lonely in the rain. She waved goodbye to her favorite bakery, the grocery store, and the neighborhood softball field, which was a swirl of cold, brown mud. She waved goodbye to the frozen Charles River, and a tear fell down her face as she watched Boston vanish in the rearview mirror of the truck they had rented to move their lives across the country.

2 Vivian had known for over six months that she was going to move to San Francisco, but she didn't want to believe it. Boston had been her home since she was born; it was all she knew, and she loved it. After all, Boston had the best Italian food, beautiful buildings, subways, and—most importantly—her friends. What would she do in a new city without her friends?

3 For the past couple of months, Vivian and her dad had been reading about San Francisco and California. He wanted her to be excited, but she didn't care that San Francisco was on a beautiful bay with scenic hills. She didn't care that the city was known for having some of the best food in the world. She didn't care about the spectacular Golden Gate Bridge and the warmer winters. Boston was beautiful and had wonderful restaurants, and she adored the fall leaves and the snowy winters.

4 Vivian and her dad took two and a half weeks to drive to San Francisco. By the time they crossed the California state line, they had driven through twelve states, four mountain ranges, three national parks, and countless cities and towns. Vivian felt exhausted from the long trip, and now she had to face the reality of why she was on the trip in the first place: California was her new home.

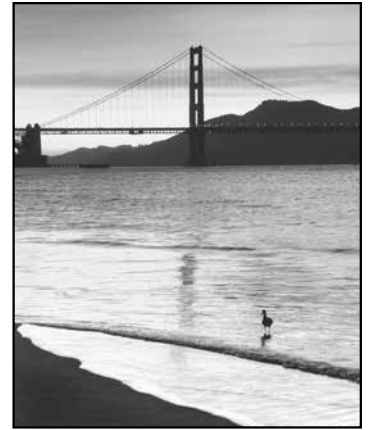
5 The book that said San Francisco is hilly was right. Vivian thought that “hilly” was an understatement. She felt like she was on a roller coaster as they drove through the steep hills of the city. She thought it was too bad that San Francisco didn't get snow like Boston does. These hills would be amazing for sledding! On the other hand, she thought about how much more fun the double-seated bike that she and her dad rode around Boston would be on these hills—at least going down!

6 After driving around for a while, Vivian's dad stopped the truck at the top of a hill in front of a house with a pink door. Her dad wasn't particularly excited about the bubble-gum-colored entrance, but Vivian was thrilled. The red door on their house in Boston suddenly didn't feel so far away. She ran through the door, up the stairs, and into the second room on the right, just like her dad had explained. This was her room, and it was perfect. It had blue walls, a slanted ceiling, and a circle window that looked out on the street. The movers already had set up her bed in the room. San Francisco was starting to feel more like home every minute.

7 Vivian and her dad left their new house after several hours of unpacking to find somewhere to eat dinner. They found themselves in a part of town called North Beach. Vivian smiled when she saw restaurants with names like Mama Mia and Mangia Bene, and red, white, and green flags hanging in the windows. She was delighted to smell the delicious aromas floating in the air. She recognized that this was the Italian section of town and couldn't believe how similar it was to the North End in Boston.



8 Before going home, Vivian and her dad decided to take a trolley car to a nearby beach. They wanted to watch the sun set on their first day in San Francisco. When Vivian stepped off the trolley, she saw the waves lapping onto the beach in front of the silhouette of the Golden Gate Bridge. She wondered if it were possible for San Francisco to be as wonderful as Boston. So far, San Francisco was pretty great. She let out a sigh as she watched the sun turn colors and fade away. She thought about how her friends in Boston were probably asleep, and she wondered what new friends she would meet in San Francisco.



Answer the following questions.

1 This question has two parts. Answer Part A, and then answer Part B.

Part A

Which sentence helps convey the central idea that Vivian is changing her mind about the move?

- A** "On a gray, rainy morning, Vivian waved goodbye to the red door she had walked through for the last time."
- B** "San Francisco was starting to feel more like home every minute."
- C** "For the past couple of months, Vivian and her dad had been reading about San Francisco and California."
- D** "Boston was beautiful and had wonderful restaurants, and she adored the fall leaves and the snowy winters."

Part B

Which two details from the story support the central idea in Part A?

- A** "She felt like she was on a roller coaster as they drove through the steep hills of the city."
- B** "These hills would be amazing for sledding!"
- C** "Her dad wasn't particularly excited about the bubble-gum-colored entrance, but Vivian was thrilled."
- D** "She was delighted to smell the delicious aromas floating in the air."
- E** "Before going home, Vivian and her dad decided to take a trolley car to a nearby beach."
- F** "She thought about how her friends in Boston were probably asleep, and she wondered what new friends she would meet in San Francisco."



2 What is the central idea of paragraph 3?

- A Vivian’s dad thinks San Francisco is better than Boston.
- B San Francisco doesn’t get snow like Boston does.
- C Vivian doesn’t want to leave Boston for San Francisco.
- D Only Vivian loves the fall and the winter seasons.

3 The story “Vivian’s Move” explores the theme that change can be both sad and exciting. Write a short paragraph in which you describe how Vivian is feeling about her move by the end of the story. Use details from the text to support your answer.

 **Self Check** *Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 44.*