

Lesson 8

Finding the Theme of a Poem

Learning Target

Studying how a poet reflects upon a topic and the details she includes will help you identify the theme of a poem.

- **Read** Poems can express feelings and ideas on many **topics**. The **speaker** in a poem **reflects** on a topic by saying what he or she thinks and feels about it. You can use these reflections and other details in a poem to figure out that poem's message, or **theme**.

Identify the theme of this comic strip by studying what the characters say and do. Also think about how the comic strip ends.



► **Think** What have you learned so far about using details to identify a theme? Complete the chart below, filling it out with details from the comic strip.

What Do the Characters Say?	What Do the Characters Do?	How Does the Comic Strip End?	What Is the Theme?
			<p><i>Night can ease the worries of the day.</i></p>

► **Talk** Share your chart with a partner.

- What is the topic of the comic strip?
- Did you describe in the same way what the friends say and do? How about the ending?
- Do the details you found support the theme? How do you know?



Academic Talk

Use these words to talk about the text.

- **theme**
- **topics**
- **speaker**
- **reflect**

Darkness in the Desert

by Morena Sommers

For desert animals, the day
Is not a time for work or play.
There's little shade; the world is dry.
The clouds are absent from the sky.

5 Things sizzle in the searing heat,
The burning sands hurt creatures' feet—
And so when it turns light they creep
Beneath the ground to fall asleep.

But late in the day the sky grows dim.
10 The sun drops past the canyon rim.
The stars peek through, and very soon
The night replaces afternoon.
Inside their dens the creatures stir—
They like the cooler temperature.
15 By ones and twos, by fives and tens
The animals creep from their dens.

On mountain, prairie, plain, and hill,
The night is when the world is still.
In deserts, though, the times reverse:
20 The dark is good, the light is worse.
The daytime is the time to rest.
For desert creatures, night is best.

The desert fox, the mouse, the hare,
At night they scamper here and there.
25 Their claws scratch softly in the sand.
Their faint calls echo through the land.
From dusk to dawn, all through the night
They feed and play till morning light.

Close Reader Habits

When you reread the poem, **circle** words and phrases that tell the topic of the poem. Then **underline** details that show the speaker's reflections on the topic.

Explore

What details in the poem “Darkness in the Desert” develop its theme?



Look for evidence of what the speaker thinks about day and night in the desert.

Think

- 1 Complete the chart below. Identify the poem’s topic, the details that develop the topic, and the speaker’s reflections on the topic. Use this information to determine the theme of the poem.

What Is the Topic of the Poem?	What Are the Details About the Topic?	What Are the Speaker’s Reflections on the Topic?	What Is the Theme of the Poem?

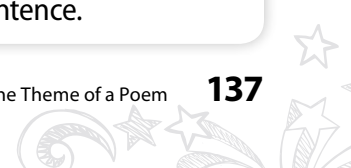
Talk

- 2 Share your charts. Did you and your partner identify the same theme? What details did you use to support your understanding of the poem’s theme? If necessary, return to your chart to change or add details.

Write

- 3 **Short Response** What is the theme of the poem “Darkness in the Desert”? Use examples from the poem and your chart to support your response. Use the space provided on page 140 to write your answer.

HINT Start your response by stating the theme in one sentence.



NIGHT WALK

by Amy Saito

1 The sky above, the streets below,
The stars reflecting off the snow—
A lovely night for us to go
Out for a walk, the puppy thinks.

5 The moon's a brilliant shade of gold,
And though she's just a few months old,
The puppy knows the night is cold—
She leans into the wind and blinks.

What's that thing moving in the tree?

10 The puppy dashes up to see.
It's vanished! What a mystery!
She sits beneath the tree to bark.

Her master guides her through the night
First turning left, then turning right

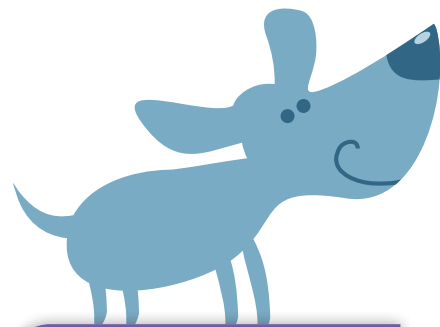
15 The dark is deep, there is no light
She yanks her leash: is this the park?

The night's a lovely time to roam
But now it's time for heading home.
She's only little, after all,

20 Can't run all night when she's so small.

Someday she'll grow a little more
And when she's three, or maybe four
She'll run all night, and she'll be tough—
Tonight, though, she's gone far enough.

25 Her master strokes her furry head,
And yawning, she goes off to bed.
But as she sleeps, the moonlight beams
Will dart and dance inside her dreams.



Close Reader Habits

What is the message of the poem? Reread the poem. **Underline** details showing what the puppy does. Use these details to identify the poem's theme.



A narrative poem tells a story. Identifying how characters respond to events will help you figure out the theme of the poem.

Think Use what you learned from reading the poem to answer the following questions.

1 This question has two parts. Answer Part A. Then answer Part B.

Part A

How are the events in stanzas three and four important to the theme of the poem?

- A** The events show it is a good night for a walk.
- B** The events show that puppy is young and active.
- C** The events show the speaker is the puppy's master.
- D** The events show that the night is dark and dangerous.

Part B

Select **one** choice from **each** stanza that **best** supports the answer to Part A.

- A** "What's that thing moving in the tree?" (stanza three)
- B** "The puppy dashes up to see." (stanza three)
- C** "...sits beneath the tree..." (stanza three)
- D** "Her master guides her..." (stanza four)
- E** "...there is no light..." (stanza four)
- F** "She yanks her leash:..." (stanza four)

Talk

2 What details in the poem can help you identify the topic and the theme of "Night Walk"? Use the chart on page 141 to record such details.

HINT Think about the speaker's reflections on how the puppy will change over time.

Write

3 Short Response Describe the topic and the theme of the poem "Night Walk." Use details from the poem and your chart to support your response. Use the space provided on page 141 to write your answer.



Write Use the space below to write your answer to the question on page 137.

Darkness in the Desert

3 Short Response What is the theme of the poem “Darkness in the Desert”? Use examples from the poem and your chart to support your response.

HINT Start your response by stating the theme in one sentence.



Don't forget to check your writing.

Check Your Writing

- Did you read the prompt carefully?
- Did you put the prompt in your own words?
- Did you use the best evidence from the text to support your ideas?
- Are your ideas clearly organized?
- Did you write in clear and complete sentences?
- Did you check your spelling and punctuation?

NIGHT WALK

2 Use the chart below to organize your ideas.

What Is the Topic of the Poem?	What Are the Details About the Topic?	What Are the Speaker's Reflections on the Topic?	What Is the Theme of the Poem?



Write Use the space below to write your answer to the question on page 139.

3 Short Response Describe the topic and the theme of the poem "Night Walk." Use details from the poem and your chart to support your response.

WORDS TO KNOW

As you read, look inside, around, and beyond these words to figure out what they mean.

- **assured**
- **complained**

Anna's MONSTERS

by Justin Nuñez

- 1 I'm scared of the darkness, I don't care who knows it,
I don't like the darkness at all.
I sleep with the lights on—two lights in my room,
And a much brighter light in the hall.
- 5 I'm frightened of monsters that might come and get me,
Whenever I climb into bed.
My mother says, "Anna, you're just being silly,
The monsters are all in your head!"

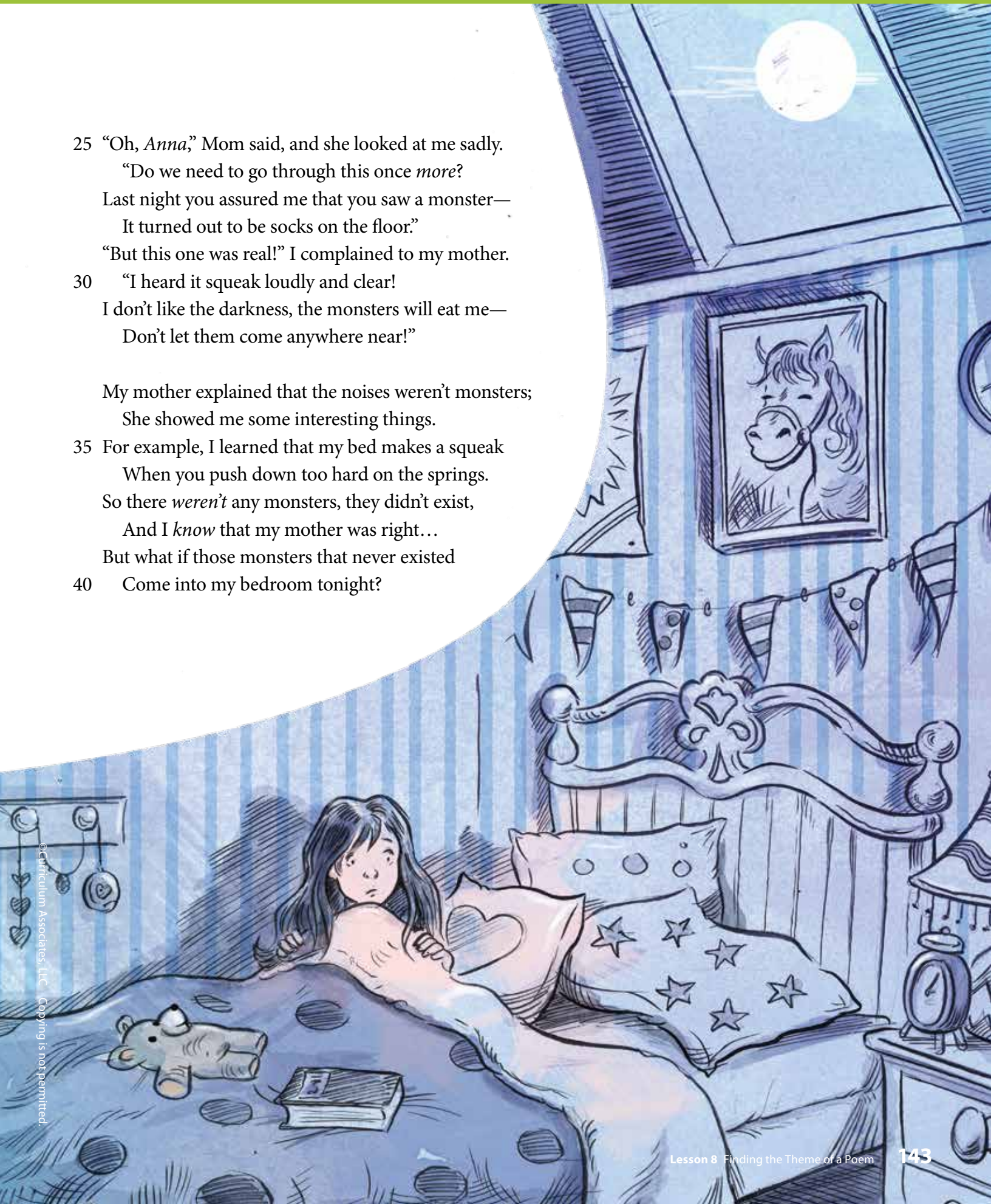
- But I don't think that's true, because of what happened
- 10 Last night, the first day of the week.
I put on my nightgown, got under the covers—
Rolled over, and heard a strange squeak.
It wasn't a mouse, and it wasn't a rabbit,
It wasn't a dog or a cat.
- 15 So I screamed out in terror. My mother came running!
"Whatever," she asked me, "was that?"

- "I heard a strange noise!" I explained to my mother,
I was almost too frightened to talk.
I *knew* it was monsters, some big hungry monsters,
- 20 It was all I could do not to squawk!
"I *don't* like the darkness," I said to my mother,
"I don't like the dark and the night.
Can't I get up and sit with you out on the couch,
In a room that's all cheery and bright?"



25 “Oh, *Anna*,” Mom said, and she looked at me sadly.
 “Do we need to go through this once *more*?
 Last night you assured me that you saw a monster—
 It turned out to be socks on the floor.”
 “But this one was real!” I complained to my mother.
 30 “I heard it squeak loudly and clear!
 I don’t like the darkness, the monsters will eat me—
 Don’t let them come anywhere near!”

My mother explained that the noises weren’t monsters;
 She showed me some interesting things.
 35 For example, I learned that my bed makes a squeak
 When you push down too hard on the springs.
 So there *weren’t* any monsters, they didn’t exist,
 And I *know* that my mother was right...
 But what if those monsters that never existed
 40 Come into my bedroom tonight?



Think Use what you learned from reading the poem to answer the following questions.

1 This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then answer Part B.

Part A

Read the line from the first stanza of the poem.

The monsters are all in your head!

Which phrase **best** states the meaning of all in your head?

- A** easy to see
- B** ready to attack you
- C** only imagined
- D** giving you a headache

Part B

Which detail in the first stanza **best** helps the reader understand the meaning of all in your head?

- A** "I'm scared of the darkness, . . ."
- B** "I sleep with the lights on, . . ."
- C** "Whenever I climb into bed."
- D** "'Anna, you're just being silly, . . .'"

2 Which statement **best** summarizes the speaker's message about fears?

- A** For most people, nighttime is scary because it is dark and quiet and nobody is awake.
- B** Many people are much too fearful, and some are even afraid of their own surroundings.
- C** It can be hard to stop being afraid, even when someone proves that what you fear is not real.
- D** It is easy to get over a fear once someone shows you that your fear is based on something that is not real.

- 3** This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then answer Part B.

Part A

How are the events in stanzas two and three important to the poem's theme?

- A** These events show Anna doesn't like the dark of night because that is when she sees the monsters.
- B** These events show Anna remembers it was last night that she heard a squeak.
- C** These events show Anna's mother comes running in fear when Anna screams.
- D** These events show Anna believes that monsters make the noises that scare her in the dark.

Part B

Select **one** choice from **each** stanza that **best** supports the answer to Part A.

- A** "... because of what happened. . . ." (stanza two)
 - B** "... I screamed out in terror." (stanza two)
 - C** "... 'Whatever,' she asked me, 'was that?'" (stanza two)
 - D** "I *knew* it was monsters, . . ." (stanza three)
 - E** "It was all I could do. . . ." (stanza three)
 - F** "... a room that's all cheery and bright?" (stanza three)
- 4** Which line from the poem **best** summarizes a theme of the poem?
- A** "'The monsters are all in your head!'" (line 8)
 - B** "Rolled over, and heard a strange squeak." (line 12)
 - C** "So I screamed out in terror. My mother came running!" (line 15)
 - D** "'I *don't* like the darkness,' I said to my mother," (line 21)

WORDS TO KNOW

As you read, look inside, around, and beyond these words to figure out what they mean.

- **hovering**
- **vaster**

SUMMER NIGHT

by Bianca Cappeletta

- 1 The city is full of streetlights, stoplights, floodlights
making it hard to see the stars
But Ben and Louie are out this summer night at ten PM
in front of their apartment building, peering up at the sky anyway.
- 5 Ben asks if that's the constellation Orion hovering over there just
above that billboard
Louie shrugs because he doesn't know for sure
He asks how many light-years to the edge of the universe
and what's beyond the edge when you get there
- 10 *if you could get there (which you probably can't, but if you could)*
Ben says he doesn't know for sure either
It's a vast place, the universe, but what's beyond it must be vaster still
And they know they should go inside and get ready for bed
but it's too wonderful out here below the faint glow of the stars
- 15 and they just can't



Write Use what you learned from reading “Summer Night” to answer the following question.

5 Short Response What is the theme of the poem “Summer Night”? Use details from the poem to support your answer.



Learning Target

In this lesson, you used details from poems to identify their themes. Explain why this activity is important for understanding poetry in general.
