Finding the theme worksheet

5th grade reading · Literature · RL.5.2

Name _____ Date _____

For grown-ups: 10 questions from our finding the theme practice, easier ones first. Read a question aloud if your child wants that, then check together with the answer key on page 3. Read the passage before the questions that go with it. Circle the letter of the best answer, or the right word where there are no letters.

The Slowest Runner

Priya was the slowest runner on the cross-country team, and everybody knew it. At every meet she finished last, long after the crowd had drifted toward the snack table.

Her coach never seemed to mind. "Did you beat your time?" he asked after every race. Usually she had, by a few seconds. "Then you won," he would say.

Priya did not feel like a winner. In October, she thought about quitting. She even wrote the note. But the next morning was cold and bright, and her legs wanted to run, so she went to practice anyway and never handed it in.

By spring, something had happened. Her time had dropped by four minutes since September. She still finished behind most of the team, but now there were two runners behind her, and the crowd was still there when she crossed the line.

At the last meet of the year, the coach gave out one award: Most Improved. He called Priya's name. Her teammates cheered louder than they had for anyone.

Walking home with the small trophy, Priya realized something. She had never been racing the other runners. She had only ever been racing the girl she was yesterday.

1. **What is the theme of this story?**
   - **A.** Quitting is sometimes the best choice when something feels too hard
   - **B.** Winning races is the only way to prove you belong on a team
   - **C.** Measuring yourself against your own past is more meaningful than comparing yourself to others
   - **D.** Cross-country is a hard sport that takes a whole year of practice

2. **Which detail best supports the theme?**
   - **A.** The crowd drifted to the snack table
   - **B.** She wrote a note
   - **C.** October was cold
   - **D.** The coach asked, "Did you beat your time?"

3. **Why did Priya not quit?**
   - **A.** She lost the note
   - **B.** Her coach begged her
   - **C.** Her parents made her
   - **D.** Part of her still wanted to run

Finding the theme worksheet

5th grade reading · questions, continued

Questions about “The Slowest Runner”, continued

4. **How does the Most Improved award connect to the theme?**

   A. It proves she was the fastest
   B. It honors progress rather than finishing first
   C. It made her teammates jealous
   D. It shows awards do not matter

5. **True or false: The theme of a story is usually stated directly in the first sentence.**

   ○ **True** ○ **False**

6. **Which statement is a theme, not just a topic?**

   A. A girl and her dog
   B. Friendship
   C. School
   D. True friends stand by you when things are hard

7. **Which sentence best states the theme of this fable?**

   > A young fox laughed at the tortoise for carrying her heavy shell everywhere. "You would be so much faster without it!" he said. That night a hailstorm struck. The fox shivered under a bush while the tortoise slept soundly inside her shell.

   A. Hailstorms are dangerous
   B. Foxes should carry shells
   C. Tortoises are smarter than foxes
   D. What looks like a burden may actually be a strength

8. **True or false: Two different stories can have the same theme.**

   ○ **True** ○ **False**

9. **What is the theme of this poem?**

   > The oak does not hurry.
   > It does not check the calendar
   > or envy the quick-blooming weeds.
   > It grows one ring a year,
   > and after a hundred years
   > it is the only thing left standing.

   A. Oaks live a hundred years
   B. Slow, steady growth outlasts quick flashes
   C. Trees cannot read calendars
   D. Weeds are bad

10. **Which detail would best support the theme "You cannot judge someone by first impressions"?**

    A. The gruff janitor turns out to spend his weekends building wheelchairs for shelter dogs
    B. The janitor mops every hallway in the school every single afternoon
    C. The janitor has a gray mustache and a deep, rumbling voice
    D. The janitor arrives at 6 a.m. and leaves after the last bus

Answer key: Finding the theme

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1. **C. Measuring yourself against your own past is more meaningful than comparing yourself to others**
   Priya learns she was "racing the girl she was yesterday," which is the central message.
2. **D. The coach asked, "Did you beat your time?"**
   The coach's question focuses on self-improvement, which is the heart of the theme.
3. **D. Part of her still wanted to run**
   On the cold, bright morning, "her legs wanted to run," so she went anyway.
4. **B. It honors progress rather than finishing first**
   The award celebrates improvement, exactly what the theme is about.
5. **False**
   Readers usually figure out the theme from what characters do and learn, not from a direct statement.
6. **D. True friends stand by you when things are hard**
   A theme is a full statement about life. "Friendship" is only a topic.
7. **D. What looks like a burden may actually be a strength**
   The shell seemed like a burden but protected the tortoise. That is the lesson.
8. **True**
   Many different stories share themes like perseverance, honesty, or friendship.
9. **B. Slow, steady growth outlasts quick flashes**
   The oak grows slowly but endures, while quick weeds do not. The poem values steady patience.
10. **A. The gruff janitor turns out to spend his weekends building wheelchairs for shelter dogs**
    A gruff person doing something tender shows that the first impression was wrong.