Analyzing a Central Idea or Theme

Choose three important details from different parts of the text. Remember that these details might relate to the main characters, the setting, the central conflict, or even the title. Then, use the following organizer to analyze how the author uses these details to develop the text’s theme, or central message.

Analyzing Theme Development

Important Detail (Beginning)

What It Shows:

Important Detail (Middle)

What It Shows:

Important Detail (End)

What It Shows:

Theme
Informational Text 3

3. Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

Explanation

Authors of informational texts organize ideas and events in a logical order that is clear and easy for readers to follow. They use a variety of text structures to introduce and develop ideas and events and to establish or show connections between them. Among the text structures they commonly use are chronological order, cause-and-effect, and comparison-and-contrast.

As you read, look for words that signal connections between ideas and events. For example, words such as first, next, and then often signal chronological order. Words such as because and as a result signal a cause-and-effect connection between ideas, and words such as by contrast, on the other hand, and similarly signal comparison-and-contrast order.

Examples

- To show connections among ideas or events that happened over a period of time, authors use chronological order. For example, suppose that an author’s central idea is that the space shuttle is a reliable, convenient way to carry cargo into space. To develop this idea, the author might relate a brief history of space shuttle flights in the order in which they occurred, describing what each mission accomplished.
- Authors use cause-and-effect order to illustrate how and why one idea or event influenced another. For example, an author might explain how the failure of an early space shuttle design caused NASA engineers to make changes to improve the shuttle’s safety or performance.
- To show how events or ideas are similar and different, authors use a comparison-and-contrast text structure. For example, an author might explain how a space shuttle is similar to and different from a rocket or an airplane.

Academic Vocabulary

definition of cause-and-effect
chronological order
definition of comparison-and-contrast
logical order

Apply the Standard

Use the worksheet that follows to help you apply the standard as you read. Several copies of the worksheet have been provided for you to use with different informational texts.

- Analyzing the Development and Connection of Ideas or Events
Analyzing the Development and Connection of Ideas or Events

As you read informational texts, use the following organizer to analyze how each author uses a particular text structure to develop and connect important ideas or events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas or Events Developed</th>
<th>Words Connecting Ideas or Events</th>
<th>Ideas or Events Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type of Connection Between Ideas or Events
Complex characters—are at the heart of good stories. Like real people, complex characters have both strengths and weaknesses. They also change and develop over the course of a story. Sometimes their motivations cause internal conflict, as the characters struggle with their feelings or try to determine what action to take. A main character’s conflicting motivations can advance the story’s plot, the series of events that occur in a story. Noticing how a complex character changes and thinking about what he or she learns will help you analyze how the author explores and develops the story’s theme, or message about life.

Examples

- Complex characters often have several, sometimes conflicting, motivations. Suppose, for example, you read a story about a boy who wants to be on his school’s basketball team, which requires several hours of practice after school each day. However, he also wants to get a part-time job after school so that he can help his parents pay the family’s bills. This character has conflicting motivations. He cannot easily achieve both of the things he wants.

- A character’s conflicting motivations can serve as the engine that sets in motion a story’s plot, or related series of events. For example, the boy trying to decide between the basketball team or a part-time job might be motivated to ask his friends or the basketball coach for advice. That action might result in a series of events; for example, the coach might then ask the boy’s parents to allow their son to practice, and so forth.

- The way a complex character changes during a story can help develop the story’s theme. For example, if the boy chooses the basketball team over the job, the writer can explore the importance of young people being part of a team. If the boy chooses the part-time job, the writer can explore the importance of young people learning to sacrifice and taking responsibility.

Academic Vocabulary

- motivation a character’s reason for doing things
- plot the series of story events that establish and resolve the character’s conflicts
- theme a story’s central idea or message about life

Apply the Standard

Use the worksheet that follows to help you apply the standard as you read. Several copies of the worksheet have been provided for you to use with a number of different selections.

- Analyzing Characters
Analyzing Characters

Use this organizer to analyze a complex character whose conflicting motivations advance a story’s plot and help develop the story’s theme.
Informational Text 9

9. Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington’s Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech, King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”), including how they address related themes and concepts.

Explanation

When you analyze and compare historic U.S. documents, you learn about key ideas that have shaped American values. Some of these documents and speeches have played important roles in U.S. history and continue to influence people today. In many instances, these documents present political arguments, positions on important issues, and American ideals. Political arguments usually include both logical appeals and emotional appeals to persuade their audiences. Many important documents address related themes and concepts.

Examples

• Logical appeals use facts and reasons to build an argument and change people’s thinking. For example, in his 1933 First Inaugural Address, Franklin Delano Roosevelt presented facts about the effects of the Great Depression before explaining how he proposed to solve the problem. In his 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech, Martin Luther King, Jr., cited facts about segregation, housing discrimination, and voting rights to explain why African Americans had to fight for civil rights.

• Emotional appeals use words with strong positive or negative connotations to affect people’s feelings about an issue. For example, Roosevelt described banking and business leaders as “unscrupulous money changers” and cited their “callous and selfish wrongdoing” as causes of the Great Depression. King described African Americans as “seared in the flames of withering injustice” and “crippled by the manacles of segregation.”

• Although their authors may use different kinds of language, many historical documents address similar themes and concepts. These documents often include memorable quotations and images that help people remember the authors’ key ideas. For example, most Americans remember Roosevelt’s claim that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” They also remember this key sentence from King’s speech: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in nation where they will not be judged by the color of the skin but by the content of their character.”

Academic Vocabulary

logical appeal using facts and reasons to persuade an audience
emotional appeal using words with strong positive or negative connotations
theme central idea or message of a text

Apply the Standard

Use the worksheet that follows to help you apply the standard as you read important documents from U.S. history. Several copies of the worksheet have been provided for you.

• Analyzing Historical Documents
Analyzing Historical Documents

Use this organizer to analyze and compare two historic U.S documents or speeches. Focus on the authors’ use of different types of appeals or memorable language to address an important theme or ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Document 1</th>
<th>Document 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical Appeals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Appeals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important Concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorable Quotations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cause-Effect Frame

About the Strategy
A cause-effect frame helps students identify what happened and why it happened in both fictional and nonfictional texts. When students can see that there are causal relationships between events or ideas in text, they can make generalizations about other causal relationships in new texts and in life situations.

Cause-Effect Frame

- Suzy sees Leah for the first time in the refugee camp, where Leah refuses the sweater that Suzy brings.
- Suzy goes to school but tears off her nametag.
- The nametag reminds her of the yellow star she had to wear in Germany.
- Leah has to have her appendix out. While Leah is sick, Suzy reads Leah's diary.
- Suzy's teacher assigns her to help Leah. Suzy thinks Leah is mean because she never smiles and doesn't talk much.
- Suzy is shocked by what she reads and gets more information from her mother that helps her understand Leah.
- Suzy and Leah begin to become friends.

Skills and Strategies: summarize, sequence, cause-effect, make inferences

Step 1
To find an effect, ask, "What happened?"

Step 2
To find a cause, ask, "Why did this happen?"

Keep in Mind
- Suggest that students look for clue words, such as since, as a result, consequently, therefore, and thus.
- Remind students that some causes are not stated in the text. Students will have to figure out the cause by looking at what happened and asking themselves, "Why might this have happened?"

Solo Exploration
Help students see that they can use cause-effect frames as a way to organize their writing. Students can choose an important school issue and use a cause-effect frame to outline the main point. Ask students to place the outlines in their portfolios to use for future writing. (portfolio)
Character-Change Map

About the Strategy
A character-change map helps students understand characters in fiction. By analyzing a character over the course of a story, students can see how a character changes in response to plot events.

The following character-change map is modeled using an excerpt from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character-Change Map</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong>: from <em>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character</strong>: Marguerite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Character at the beginning of the story**
   - Quiet and shy
   - Embarrassed by her grandmother's lack of education
   - In awe of Mrs. Flowers
   - Enjoys writing and reading, but not speaking

2. **Events that caused change**
   - Mrs. Flowers invites Marguerite to her house.
   - They talk together, and Mrs. Flowers reads aloud to Marguerite.
   - She asks Marguerite to recite for her the next time they get together.

3. **Character at the end of the story**
   - Feels more liked and respected
   - Learns to tolerate her grandmother's literacy
   - Feels proud because she knows Mrs. Flowers likes her
   - Enjoys reading favorite books aloud—more confident

**Skills and Strategies:** understand characters, draw conclusions, make inferences

**Step 1**
Students tell what the character is like at the beginning of the story.

**Step 2**
Then students record plot events that cause the character to change.

**Step 3**
Students tell what the character is like at the end of the story.

**Idea Exchange**
Keep in Mind
You may want to ask students to map the changes in more than one character in a selection.

**Solo Exploration**
To help students see that cause-and-effect relationships are often a part of change, suggest that they create a cause-and-effect map for the changes a character goes through in a story.
Character-Change Map

Title

Character

Character at the beginning of the story

Events that caused change

Character at the end of the story
**Character-Trait Web**

**About the Strategy**

A character-trait web helps students understand characters in fiction. By identifying character traits, students become personally involved in their reading, which increases their understanding and enjoyment of the selection.

You may want to create a character-trait web for more than one character in a selection.

**Character-Trait Web**

- He forgets his own address and leaves his briefcase in a taxi.
- He wears clothes that don't fit, a crumpled hat, and glasses with a lens missing.
- He looks for his umbrella but realizes that he's left it somewhere.
- A friend is driving by in a taxi and takes Shmiel home to his own birthday party.

**Skills and Strategies:** understand characters, draw conclusions, make inferences

**Step 1**

Students write the character's name in the center circle.

**Step 2**

Then students write character traits on the lines coming out of the center circle.

**Step 3**

In the outer circles, students add examples that illustrate each character trait.

**Keep in Mind**

- Modify the number of traits as necessary to fit a selection or character.
- Examples can come directly from the story or can be based on inferences that students make.

**All Together Now**

Encourage students to use a character-trait web to determine if a character had a fatal flaw. They can write a statement at the bottom of the web telling why a particular trait was the character's fatal flaw.
Compare-Contrast Text Frame

About the Strategy
A compare-contrast selection is organized on the basis of similarities and differences of its subjects. A compare-contrast text frame helps students recognize this type of expository text structure. Knowledge of this and other expository text structures helps students comprehend content-area texts and compare texts.

Skills and Strategies: compare-contrast, draw conclusions, use text structure/genre, use text features

Idea Exchange

Keep in Mind
• Remind students to look for clue words, such as different from, alike, and resemble.
• If students are having difficulty recognizing comparisons and contrasts, encourage them to consider what features of the subjects are being compared.

Solo Exploration
Help students see how they can use a compare-contrast text frame to organize ideas for writing. Students can choose two time periods such as the Middle Ages and the present to compare and contrast. Students can place the text frames in their portfolios to use for future writing. (portfolio)
Compare-Contrast Text Frame

[Diagram of compare-contrast text frame]

Name:

Date:
Making Personal Connections Organizer

What is being explained or described in the text:

Connection to My Personal Experiences
1.
2.
3.

Connection to Other Things (movies, books, other people)
1.
2.
3.
Literature 2

2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Explanation

Love conquers all. It is hard to forgive a friend’s betrayal. In a dangerous situation, ordinary people can show unexpected courage. You can probably think of several books or movies that convey these messages about life. A literary work’s central idea or message about life is called its theme. An author does not necessarily state the theme of a work directly. Often, the reader has to figure it out by studying the story details that develop and refine the theme. You can begin to analyze how an author develops a theme by making an objective summary, a brief restatement of the important details in a work.

Examples

• To write an objective summary, you briefly restate the important details in a work — without including your own opinions. For example, when summarizing the fairy tale “Cinderella,” you might say, “Cinderella is treated cruelly by her stepsisters. A fairy godmother dresses Cinderella for a prince’s party, but tells Cinderella to be home by midnight. Later, as Cinderella rushes home from the ball, she loses her glass slipper. The prince searches for the girl who lost the glass slipper. The glass slipper fits Cinderella. She marries the prince and lives happily ever after.”

• To determine a story’s theme, or central idea, analyze details in the text for clues about the message the writer is trying to convey. These details might relate to the main characters, the setting, the central conflict, or even the title. If the text is a story, pay special attention to whether or how the characters develop, their conflicts, and what happens to them over the course of the story. As you observe and study such details, ask yourself if you detect an emerging theme. For example, as you study the details of the story of Cinderella, you may note that a theme is being developed: With a little help, a good person can overcome hardship and difficult circumstances and find happiness.

Academic Vocabulary

summary a brief restatement of the important details in a work
theme a story’s central idea or message about life

Apply the Standard

Use the worksheets that follow to help you apply the standard as you read. Several copies of each worksheet have been provided for you to use with a number of different selections.

• Summarizing a Text
• Analyzing a Central Idea or Theme
**Summarizing a Text**

Use this organizer to identify the most important events or ideas in the text. Then, use them to write a brief objective summary. Remember to leave your own opinions out of the summary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event or Idea</th>
<th>Event or Idea</th>
<th>Event or Idea</th>
<th>Final Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Summary:**

...