

IDENTIFYING THEME

Theme is the central message that stretches through an entire story, drama or poem. You can think of the theme of a story as being like the lesson, or the real world application of the story. Themes often explore timeless and universal ideas. Themes can be stated outright, or they can be just implied. Some common themes are:

Be prepared

Betraying a friend also hurts you.

Revenge hurts the avenger.

Looking at fables—short stories that contain a lesson—is a good way to start thinking about theme. Read the following fables and see if you can identify which of the themes above belong to each story.

1. The Donkey, the Fox and the Lion

A donkey and a fox decided to team up to find food together. They were travelling in the forest when they crossed paths with a lion. They were both scared. But the fox hoped to save himself. He approached the lion and offered to help him get the donkey, if the lion would let him escape unharmed.



The lion agreed. So the fox and the donkey walked on, with the lion trailing behind them. The fox led the donkey to a hidden pit, left by some long-ago hunter as a trap for wild animals, and the donkey fell in. As soon as the donkey was in the pit, the lion came out of hiding and ate the fox. Then he ate the donkey.

The theme of this story is: _____

2. The Ant and the Grasshopper

It was a beautiful spring day. The grasshopper was flitting about, enjoying himself, when he crossed paths with an ant. The ant was working very hard, carrying bits of food deep down into his anthill. "Why are you working so hard?" The grasshopper said. "I want to have plenty to eat," the ant replied. The grasshopper laughed. "Plenty to eat!" he cried. "Why there is food everywhere that you look!" "That's true," the ant said. "There is enough food for today. But there will come a day when it won't be true." The grasshopper hopped away, not wanting to bother with the morose little ant.

Soon spring gave way to summer, summer to fall, and fall to winter. When the fields were covered with snow, the ant sat far down in his anthill, safe and warm, his stomach full, confident that he had enough to eat to see him through the winter. The grasshopper, who had not made any preparations for winter, shivered, and went from one friend to another begging for food and feeling very foolish indeed.

The theme of this story is: _____

**3. The Bald Man and the Fly**

A fly bit a bald man on the head. The man tried to shoo the fly away. But the fly landed on the man's head and bit him again. This made the man furious. He slapped his head to squash the fly, but the fly flew away just before the man delivered a stinging slap to his own head. The fly landed on the man's head a third time and laughed at him. "You would hurt yourself just to get back at me?" he taunted. The man was so enraged that he tried to hit the fly with a rock. Instead he knocked himself, senseless, to the ground.

The theme of this story is: _____

