

Where the Red Fern Grows

Literature Focus: Theme

Many different types of texts discuss similar themes and topics. Although texts may share a similar theme, different genres will approach the theme using different techniques. For example, a play that has the theme of “sacrifices bring rewards” will show this theme through the actions and the words of the characters on the stage. A movie with the same theme might use the character’s words less and show much of the theme through the scenery, music, and other audiovisual clues. As you read a text, pay careful attention to the techniques that the author uses to create the theme. In this activity you will compare themes in *Where the Red Fern Grows*, a poem by Langston Hughes, and one of Aesop’s Fables.

Directions: *In order to compare the themes of various texts, you first need to do a close reading of each text. Read each of the texts that follow and answer the questions.*

“Mother to Son”

by Langston Hughes

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor –
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now –
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

1. Who is the speaker in this poem and who is he or she talking to? _____

2. What is life compared to in this poem? _____

3. What message about life is this poem conveying? _____

“The Crow and the Pitcher”

Aesop’s Fables

A Crow, half-dead with thirst, came upon a Pitcher which had once been full of water; but when the Crow put its beak into the mouth of the Pitcher he found that only very little water was left in it, and that he could not reach far enough down to get at it. He tried, and he tried, but at last had to give up in despair. Then a thought came to him, and he took a pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped that into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped that into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped that into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped that into the Pitcher. At last, at last, he saw the water mount up near him, and after casting in a few more pebbles he was able to quench his thirst and save his life.

4. What problem does the crow have at first? _____

5. How does the crow solve his problem?

6. What message about life does this convey?



Where the Red Fern Grows

In Chapter 5, Billy talks with the Marshal about how he got his dogs:

I told him I had ordered them from Kentucky.
“What did they cost you?” he asked.
“Forty dollars,” I said.
He asked if my father had bought them for me.
“No,” I said. “I bought them myself.”
He asked me where I got the money.
“I worked hard and saved it,” I said.
“It takes a long time to save forty dollars,” he said.
“Yes,” I said. “It took me two years.”

In Chapter 6, Billy reflects on how he got his dogs

“Here in this fishermen’s camp, I had found the magazine and the ad. I looked over at the old sycamore log. There I had asked God to help me get two hound pups. There were the pups, rolling and playing in the warm sand. I thought of the Old K.C. Baking Powder can, and the fishermen. How freely they had given their nickels and dimes. I looked up again to the names carved in the tree. Yes, it was all there like a large puzzle. Piece by piece, each fit perfectly until the puzzle was complete. It could not have happened without the help of an unseen power.”

Compare and Contrast Themes

Directions: Now that you have read the texts from three different genres you will be comparing and contrasting their themes as well as how these themes are created. Answer the questions that follow.

1. What similarities are there in the themes in these three texts? _____

2. What differences are there between the themes of these texts? _____

3. How does the author create the theme in each of these texts? Compare and contrast the approaches used. _____
