*Instructional Learning Plan- Introducing Theme in Grades K-1*

**Primary Strand: Reading 1.9**

**Integrated Strand/s: Reading K.8**

**Essential Understanding:** **Communication & Multimodal Literacies K.1, 1.1**

All students should:

* understand that they should use a variety of strategies to assist with comprehension of fictional texts.

**Essential Knowledge, Skills, and Processes:**

To be successful with this standard, students are expected to:

* link knowledge from own experiences to make sense of and talk about a text
* identify the overall theme of a fiction selection (e.g., friendship, family, working hard)

**Primary SOL:**

1.9 h Identify theme.

**Reinforced (Related Standard) SOL:**

K.8b, 1.9c Relate previous experiences to what is read.

**Academic Background/Language:**

As students develop a deeper understanding of theme in later grades, there is a focus on examining what the character learned from the conflict and resolution of the story. While the terms conflict and resolution are not specific to first grade standards, leading students to an understanding of a story’s conflict and resolution can greatly impact their ability to identify the theme. The deeper a student’s comprehension of a story and story elements, the better the student will be able to identify the theme. Often students will confuse details from the story with the theme. For instance, a student may confuse a story to have a theme of friendship but the story depicts two characters that have a friendship. While using various fictional texts with academic language learners it is important to model the reading and theme identification process through various activities. Using sentence starters such as:

* This story makes me feel...
* One thing this story reminds me of is...
* I like/dislike this character because...
* The character had a hard time … but solved the problem by…
* The character learned...

## Materials

* Various fictional texts
* Poster/smartboard/whiteboard to write on
* Paper and Pencils

## Student/Teacher Actions: What should students be doing? What should teachers be doing?

1. Go over the definition of theme with the class. Discuss how a theme is similar to the moral of the story. “The theme is the lesson the author wants us to learn from the character’s experiences in a story. You have learned many of these lessons from your life experiences.” Go over this in detail:
   * What does it mean to be a friend? How do you know \_\_\_\_\_\_ is your friend? What are some things they do to make you think this?
   * What does it mean to do the right thing? If I were to take a pencil/eraser off of someone else’s desk, is that doing something that is right or wrong? How would that make you feel if someone took your pencil/eraser?
   * Go into detail about different universal themes and discuss as a class.
   * Create an anchor chart to post themes after discussions to then leave up in the room as reference.
2. Review the idea of theme again, reminding them of the central lesson or idea that is revealed through the events in a story. “What does the author want us to learn from this story?”
3. As a review, have the class discuss the various themes they have learned previously on the anchor chart (including but not limited to family, friendship, etc). Explain how it is important to read the entire text as the theme is the message the author reflects throughout the whole story, not just in a single moment.
4. Summarize for students a familiar story, such as Jack and the Beanstalk. After summarizing ask questions like, “Did Jack do what he was told to do?” “Do you think he did the right thing? Why/why not?”
   * Again refer to your anchor chart as you discuss the story and model thinking for students. “You do not think he listened to what he was supposed to do. Looking at our chart, would we say he was responsible? What do you think the author wanted us to learn about doing the right thing?”
5. Tell students that one way to find the theme is to examine the story’s conflict and resolution.
   * Show students the illustration of Jack selling the cow. “When Jack did this, he had a problem. What is the problem?” (He had no money after selling the cow). “Did he listen to the directions his mother gave him? Was this right or wrong? Why didn’t he have money?”
   * Then, have students discuss how Jack could have resolved his problem. “What should Jack have done with the cow?” (Jack should have sold the cow for money or maybe even food) “Since he did not listen to his mother, what happened?”
6. Discuss as a class what lessons Jack learned as you review the conflict/resolution of the story. (e.g. Do what you are told. Listen to your parents/grandparents. Doing the right thing, even if it seems hard.)
7. Discuss with students that you can often learn many lessons from a story, but they usually lead to one theme that the author wanted you to learn. In the example of lessons above, they all lead to listening to elders in your family. Rewrite these lessons as general statements.
   * For example, instead of “Jack should have listened to his parents/grandparents.” you might offer “Listen to your elders.”
   * Talk with students about how this theme applies to their life or any life experiences that may reflect this theme.
8. Review with students how when we read fictional stories, authors want us to learn from the character’s experiences to help us in our own lives.
9. As the year goes on, and you read more stories continue to look at theme by using these steps. Create an ongoing chart of universal book themes and books read that teach this theme.

**Assessment (Diagnostic, Formative, Summative)**

* On the board, write four possible themes for a familiar story, such as Little Red Riding Hood -
  + She shouldn’t have talked to the wolf.
  + People shouldn’t talk to strangers.
  + Little Red Riding Hood should have stayed on the path her mother told her to.
  + Children should listen to their parents.
* Ask students which is the best example of a theme and what makes their choice the best. Have a discussion about why the other choices are not considered themes.

**Writing Connections:**

* Give students a theme from the anchor chart or story you have read. Have students draw a picture to represent this theme.
* Use mentor text to provide support as students write stories with a decided upon theme. For example, after much discussion of Jack and the Beanstalk and life experiences about listening to adults, create a shared writing or class book with the same theme.
* As you conference with students, highlight the theme you discover in their writing. For example, a story about jumping off of a diving board could lead to a theme about bravery.

**Extensions and Connections (for all students)**

* Discuss why it’s important to understand the theme of a story? What does the author want the reader to learn?
* Allow students to share their reflections aloud.
* Give several opportunities for students to listen to and discuss the theme of a story with their peers, giving opportunities to revise their thinking.
* Provide sentence stems to support the discussion (i.e., "It is important to understand the theme because...").
* Allow students to discuss the reflection questions in pairs before sharing in a larger group.

**Strategies for Differentiation**

* With students who are having trouble identifying the theme of a story, work with students to ensure they are able to retell the story. Talk with students in detail about the character and the conflict the character experiences during the story.
* Relate the themes of a story to a real world experience for students.
* Have students find stories with common themes.