Finding Theme and Summarizing

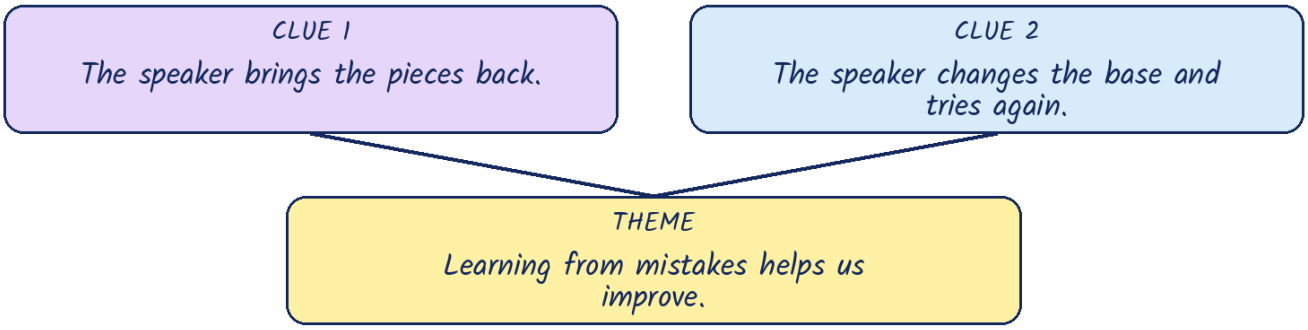
Grade 4 poetry • Read twice. Gather clues. Explain your thinking.

Name: _____ Date: _____

A theme is a message about life or people. A summary briefly tells the important ideas or events in this poem.

Watch me read The Wobbly Tower

1 My block tower tumbled with a clack.
2 I sighed, then brought the pieces back.
3 I spread the bottom wide and strong.
4 And tried again when things went wrong.



Same poem Different jobs

TOPIC: trying again. This is a subject, not a full message.

THEME: Learning from mistakes helps us improve.

SUMMARY: After a block tower falls, the speaker rebuilds it with a wider base and keeps trying.

Fill the missing ideas

Word bank: summary • theme • clues

A _____ tells the important ideas in this poem.

A _____ is a message that can apply beyond the poem.

I use _____ from the poem to support my thinking.

Theme Detectives

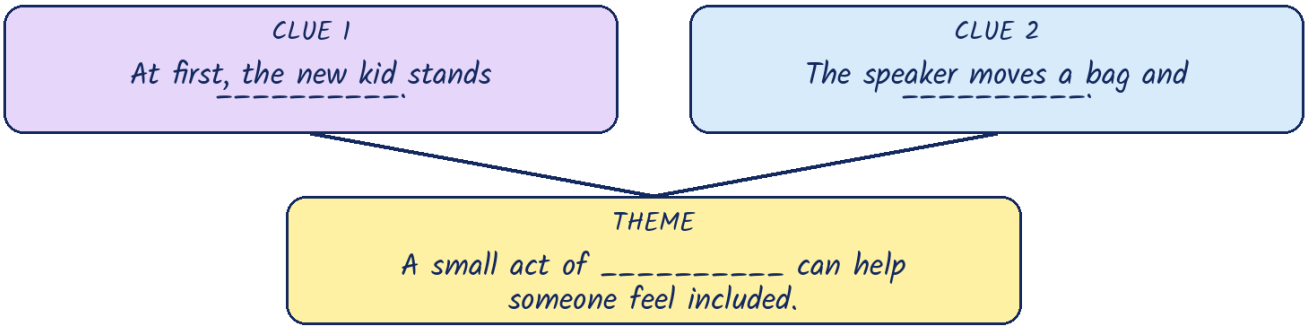
Find what the speaker learns or shows through actions and feelings.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Read together One More Chair

1 At lunch I kept a chair for Lee,
2 and hoped my friend would sit by me.
3 A new kid stood beside the door,
4 eyes fixed upon the tiled floor.
5 I moved my bag and waved him near.
6 He smiled and pulled the spare chair here.
7 When Lee arrived, we scooted wide:
8 now three of us sat side by side.

Circle the action that changes things. Underline a clue about how the new kid feels.



Word bank: kindness • alone • waves him near

Choose the best supported theme

A. Lunch B. Kindness can help others feel included.

C. The speaker saves a chair for Lee.

My choice: ____ A is a topic. C tells one event.

Lines ____ and ____ support my choice because

_____

_____

Build a Summary

Use One More Chair on page 2. Tell the poem, not the lesson.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Keep what matters

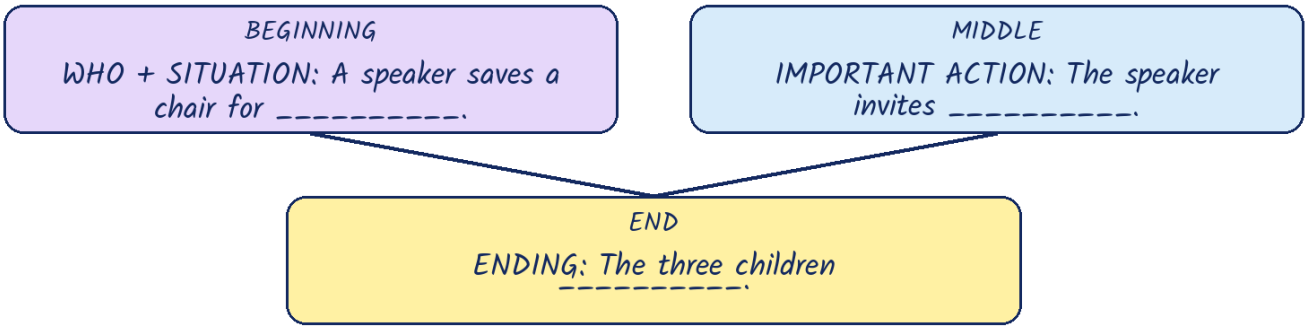
Circle the THREE details that best explain the important events.

A. The speaker saves a chair for a friend.

B. The floor is tiled.

C. The speaker invites a new kid to sit down.

D. All three children make room and sit together.



Use the parts to finish a short summary

At lunch, the speaker saves a chair for _____. When a new kid is standing alone, the speaker _____. Finally, _____.

_____

_____

Now make it even shorter

Retell the important events in ONE sentence. Do not include your opinion or every detail.

_____

_____

_____

Check: ☐ my own words ☐ important events ☐ short and accurate

Not Every Poem Tells a Story

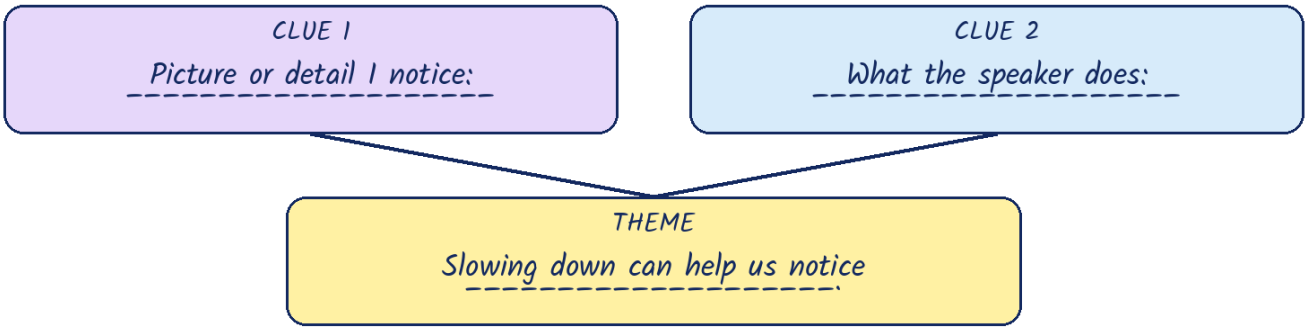
A poem can describe a moment or feeling. Look at its images and ideas.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Read and notice Small Wonders

1 A silver web between two leaves,
2 a bead of rain beneath the eaves,
3 a tiny ant that lifts a crumb,
4 a humming bee with wings that drum.
5 I slow my shoes beside the tree:
6 a world of wonders waits for me.

Word help: eaves = the edges of a roof. The speaker is the voice in a poem.



Sort the jobs Write T for theme or S for summary

___ Noticing small things can help us appreciate the world.

___ The speaker slows down and notices tiny wonders in nature.

Finish a summary without inventing a problem

The speaker describes _____

and slows down to _____.

_____

Which two details show that the speaker finds nature interesting?

_____

_____

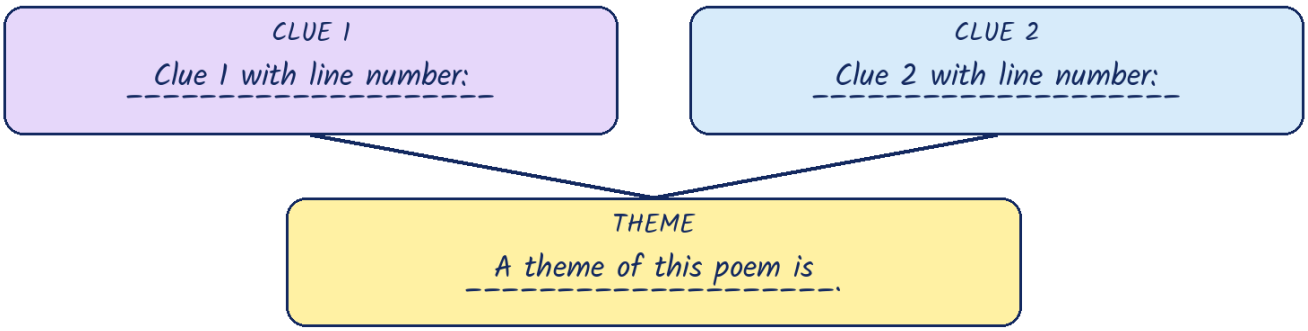
Try It On Your Own

Read the poem twice. Use its details to build both kinds of answer.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Independent practice The Paper Boat

1 We folded paper by the stream;
2 my boat was neat, a sailor's dream.
3 But Jo's boat tilted to one side.
4 "Here, try my fold," I said with pride.
5 Then mine caught fast against a stone.
6 I tugged but could not free it alone.
7 Jo found a stick and nudged it free;
8 we watched both boats drift out to sea.



These clues support my theme because _____

_____

Summarize in two sentences

Include who is involved, the important actions, and the ending. Leave out your opinion and small details.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Check: Does my theme apply to life? Does my summary stay with this poem?

The Final Poetry Check

Explain the difference. Then show what you know.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Spot the mix up

Someone says, “The theme of The Paper Boat is boats.”

Boats is a _____, not a complete theme.

Improve the answer into a message about people:

_____

_____

Sort each sentence

Write TOPIC, THEME, or SUMMARY beside each one.

1. Friendship _____

2. Friends can help each other in different ways.

_____

3. One child helps Jo fold a boat; Jo later frees the child's stuck boat.

_____

Two poems One connection

Compare One More Chair and The Paper Boat.

One message both poems support is _____

_____

A clue from One More Chair: _____

_____

A clue from The Paper Boat: _____

_____

Tell a partner: A summary tells _____. A theme explains _____.

Teacher Key and Teaching Notes

Pages 1 to 3 • Accept other accurate answers supported by the poems.

All poems in this pack are original teaching texts. Suggested use: model page 1, work together on pages 2–3, then use pages 4–6 to reduce support and check transfer.

Page 1 Watch and learn

Missing words: summary; theme; clues.

Emphasize that topic is a subject, theme is a transferable message, and summary is a brief account of this particular text. A poem can support more than one theme.

Page 2 One More Chair

Diagram: alone; waves him near; kindness. Best theme: B.

Useful evidence: lines 3–4 show the new child apart from others; line 5 shows an invitation; line 6 shows a smile; lines 7–8 show the group making space.

Possible explanation: The speaker makes room and invites the new child, who smiles and joins the others. This shows how a small kindness can help someone belong.

Accept line pairs such as 5 and 6, or 5 and 8, with a sensible explanation. Do not require the exact sample wording.

Page 3 Summarizing

Important details: A, C, D. B is a minor description.

Diagram: Lee; a new kid; make room and sit together.

Sample: At lunch, the speaker saves a chair for Lee. When a new kid is standing alone, the speaker invites him to sit. Finally, the three children make room and sit together.

Short version: The speaker invites a new child to lunch, and everyone makes room when a friend arrives.

Support without taking away the thinking

Read poems aloud, explain unfamiliar words, and allow oral rehearsal or dictation. Offer two possible themes only after students identify details. Ask “Which line helps you think that?” rather than accepting a topic word alone.

For summaries, help students group details and say the main idea in their own words. Do not force a problem-and-solution frame onto a descriptive poem.

Teacher Key and Quick Check

Pages 4 to 6 • Look for reasoning rather than a single memorized answer.

Page 4 Small Wonders

Possible image: a silver web, bead of rain, ant carrying a crumb, or humming bee. Speaker action: slows down. Theme gap: small wonders / beauty in the world / interesting things around us.

Sort: T, S. Summary: The speaker describes tiny sights and sounds in nature and slows down to notice or appreciate them.

Evidence can include any two images in lines 1–4; lines 5–6 show the speaker's attention and appreciation. Noticing beauty is a supported theme, not simply “nature.”

Page 5 The Paper Boat

Possible theme: Everyone has something to offer, and people can help one another. Also accept “Working together helps us solve problems” with appropriate explanation.

Evidence: line 4 shows the speaker offering folding help; lines 6–7 show that the speaker also needs help and Jo frees the boat. Line 8 shows both boats moving again.

Sample summary: A child helps Jo fold a paper boat, but then the child's own boat gets stuck. Jo frees it with a stick, and they watch both boats float away.

Page 6 Final check

Mix up: topic. Possible revision: Friends can use different skills to help each other.

Sort: 1 TOPIC; 2 THEME; 3 SUMMARY.

Shared message: Small helpful actions can make a difference to others. Chair evidence: the invitation in line 5 or making room in lines 7–8. Boat evidence: folding advice in line 4 or freeing the boat in line 7.

Quick observation checklist

☐ States a theme as a message, not just a topic.

☐ Uses relevant poem details and explains the connection.

☐ Summarizes important ideas accurately in own words.

☐ Omits opinions and minor details from the summary.

Next step: If the theme is vague, revisit the clues. If the summary retells every line, ask the student to choose only the two or three most important ideas.