

FINDING THE THEME: GRADE 5

Theme Determination – RL.5.2

Name: _____

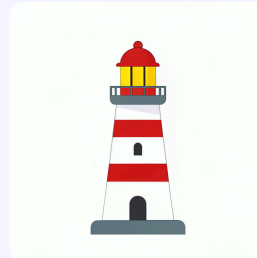
Date: _____

Instructions

Read the story carefully, then answer the questions below. Each question asks you to think about the story's theme – the central message or life lesson the author conveys. Be sure to look back in the passage to find specific details that support your answer.

The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter

On a rocky cliff overlooking the gray Atlantic Ocean stood the old Whitmore Point Lighthouse. For thirty years, Keeper Thomas had lit the great lamp each evening and trimmed the wick each morning. His daughter, Maren, had grown up counting the flashes—twelve seconds of light, then darkness, twelve seconds of light, then darkness.



One October evening, a fierce storm rolled in faster than the weather log had predicted. Waves crashed against the cliffs like giants hurling boulders, and the wind howled through the shutters. Thomas climbed the spiral stairs to check the lamp, but a sudden gust slammed the heavy door shut behind him, trapping him on the gallery walkway outside.

Maren heard her father's shouts over the storm. She grabbed the rope coil stored near the base of the lighthouse and tied one end around her waist. Her mother fastened the other end to the banister rail. "I have to help him," she said, her voice steady despite the trembling in her hands.

Climbing down the narrow exterior ladder was treacherous. Rain lashed her face, and the rope burned against her palms. Halfway down, she paused, gripping a rung with both hands. Below her, the ocean roared, its waves crashing against the rocks twenty feet below. She thought of her father waiting above, shivering and afraid.

With a deep breath, Maren continued her descent. When she reached the gallery, she found Thomas pale but uninjured. "The door latch froze," he called over the wind. Together, they worked to free the stuck door while Maren kept the lamp burning bright. By dawn, the storm had passed, and the first ship of the morning safely navigated the safe channel.

That evening, as Thomas polished the lamp glass, he turned to Maren and said, "You didn't just save me today. You kept the light burning for every sailor out there." From that day on, Maren became the assistant keeper, learning the rhythms of the sea and the weight of responsibility that came with guiding others home.

Answer the Questions

1. What is one possible theme of this story? State the theme as a message about life, and give one detail from the text that supports your answer.

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2. How does Maren respond when she faces the challenge of the storm and her father's danger? What does her response reveal about the story's theme? Use at least one specific detail from the passage.

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3. In paragraph 4, Maren pauses halfway down the ladder. What does this moment tell us about the obstacles she faces, and how does she overcome them? How does this connect to the theme?

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4. At the end of the story, Thomas tells Maren, "You didn't just save me today. You kept the light burning for every sailor out there." How does this statement help reveal the theme of the story? Explain using details from the text.

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5. What is the difference between the theme of a story and a lesson a character learns? Using this story, give an example of each and explain how they are related but not the same.

6. How does Maren's role change from the beginning of the story to the end? How does this change help convey the theme? Cite specific evidence from the passage.

7. Identify a second possible theme of this story. State the theme and explain how at least two events or details from the text support it.

8. The word perseverance means continuing to try despite difficulties. How does the theme of this story connect to the idea of perseverance? Use at least two specific details from the text in your response.



Parent/Teacher Tip

Encourage students to identify the problem (Thomas trapped outside), the climax (Maren's dangerous descent), and the resolution (safe return and new role as assistant keeper) to help them understand how the character's response reveals the story's theme. Remind students that a theme is not a single word but a message about life supported by details from the text.

Answer Key – Teacher’s Copy

Theme Questions – RL.5.2

1. What is one possible theme of this story? State the theme as a message about life, and give one detail from the text that supports your answer.

One possible theme is that courage means doing what is right even when you are afraid. Supporting detail: Maren’s voice is “steady despite the trembling in her hands,” showing she is scared but chooses to act anyway. (Accept any reasonable theme with valid textual evidence.)

2. How does Maren respond when she faces the challenge of the storm and her father’s danger? What does her response reveal about the story’s theme? Use at least one specific detail from the passage.

Maren responds by grabbing a rope, tying it around her waist, and climbing down the treacherous exterior ladder to reach her father. Her response reveals the theme that bravery and responsibility require action even in frightening situations. Detail: she says, “I have to help him,” and continues her descent even though “rain lashed her face, and the rope burned against her palms.”

3. In paragraph 4, Maren pauses halfway down the ladder. What does this moment tell us about the obstacles she faces, and how does she overcome them? How does this connect to the theme?

The pause shows that the obstacles are both physical (the dangerous ladder, the storm, the roaring ocean below) and emotional (fear and doubt). She overcomes them by taking “a deep breath” and continuing her descent. This connects to the theme that perseverance and courage are needed to push through fear and difficulty to do what is right.

4. At the end of the story, Thomas tells Maren, “You didn’t just save me today. You kept the light burning for every sailor out there.” How does this statement help reveal the theme of the story? Explain using details from the text.

Thomas’s statement reveals that Maren’s brave actions had a much larger impact than just saving one person – she protected every sailor who depended on the lighthouse. This supports the theme that individual acts of courage and responsibility can make a difference for many others. The detail that “the first ship of the morning safely navigated the safe channel” confirms the real-world result of her actions.

5. What is the difference between the theme of a story and a lesson a character learns? Using this story, give an example of each and explain how they are related but not the same.

The theme is the broader message about life the author conveys (e.g., courage means acting despite fear), while a lesson a character learns is the specific insight that character gains through the events (e.g., Maren learns that her actions can protect many people and that she is capable of great responsibility). They are related because the character’s lesson helps illustrate the theme, but the theme is universal and applies beyond the character’s personal experience.

6. How does Maren’s role change from the beginning of the story to the end? How does this change help convey the theme? Cite specific evidence from the passage.

At the beginning, Maren is described as someone who had “grown up counting the flashes” – she is an observer of her father’s work. By the end, she becomes “the assistant keeper, learning the rhythms of the sea and the weight of responsibility.” This change conveys the theme that courage and stepping up in difficult times can lead to growth and new responsibilities.

7. Identify a second possible theme of this story. State the theme and explain how at least two events or details from the text support it.

Another possible theme is that helping others often requires personal sacrifice and bravery. Supporting details: (1) Maren risks her own safety by climbing down the dangerous ladder during the storm, with waves crashing “twenty feet below.” (2) She endures physical discomfort – the rope burns her palms and rain lashes her face – but continues because her father and the sailors need the light. (Accept any reasonable second theme with two valid textual details.)

8. The word perseverance means continuing to try despite difficulties. How does the theme of this story connect to the idea of perseverance? Use at least two specific details from the text in your response.

The theme connects to perseverance because Maren does not give up even when the climb is “treacherous” and she is afraid. Detail 1: She pauses halfway down but then takes “a deep breath” and continues. Detail 2: She keeps going despite the rope burning her palms and the ocean roaring below. Her perseverance allows her to save her father and keep the lamp burning, showing that persistence through difficulty is central to the story’s message about courage and responsibility.

Curriculum references for the teacher

These sources informed the content review. A reference does not mean every expectation is covered by this worksheet.

[Reading: Literature – RL.5](#)

[Writing – W.5](#)

[Reading: Informational Text – RI.5](#)

[Reading: Foundational Skills – RF.5](#)

[Language – L.5](#)

[Speaking and Listening – SL.5](#)

[number and operations–fractions – 5.NF](#)