



artsNOW

Integrated learning solutions

EXPLORING THEMES THROUGH PRINTMAKING

Grade Band: 4-5

Content Focus: VISUAL ARTS & ELA



LEARNING DESCRIPTION

Students will explore themes in fables and fairytales by identifying key details that support a central message. They will then create a symbol that represents this theme and use printmaking techniques to produce a visual representation of their understanding.

LEARNING TARGETS

Essential Questions	"I Can" Statements
What is a theme and how can we determine it in a story?	I can identify the theme of a fable, folktale, or fairytale and explain how key details support it.
How do key details in a story help us understand its theme?	I can design a symbol that represents the theme of a story.
How can we use symbols to represent ideas or themes visually?	I can create a printing plate using a styrofoam sheet and use it to make a print.
What is printmaking, and how can it be used to express meaning?	

GEORGIA STANDARDS

Curriculum Standards	Arts Standards
Grade 4: 4.T.T.1.c Identify and describe common themes in texts (e.g., good vs. evil) that are revealed through details about characters. Grade 5: 5.T.T.1.c Explain how a theme is demonstrated through a character's growth or conflict resolution.	VA.CR.1 Engage in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas by using subject matter and symbols to communicate meaning. VA.CR.3 Understand and apply media, techniques, processes, and concepts of two-dimensional art.

SOUTH CAROLINA STANDARDS

Curriculum Standards	Arts Standards
ELA.AOR.2: Evaluate and critique the development of themes and central ideas within and across texts. Grade 4: ELA.4.AOR.2.1 Identify and explain an explicit or implied theme and how it is developed by key details in a literary text. Grade 5: ELA.5.AOR.2.1 Explain the development of an explicit or implied theme over the course of a literary text.	Anchor Standard 1: I can use the elements and principles of art to create artwork. Anchor Standard 2: I can use different materials, techniques, and processes to make art. Anchor Standard 7: I can relate visual arts ideas to other arts disciplines, content areas, and careers.

KEY VOCABULARY

Content Vocabulary	Arts Vocabulary
• <u>Theme</u> – The central idea or lesson in a story • <u>Key detail</u> – An important piece of information in a story that helps explain the main idea or theme	• <u>Symbol</u> – A visual representation of an idea or theme • <u>Printmaking</u> – The art or technique of making prints, especially as practiced in engraving, etching, dry point, woodcut or serigraphy • <u>Styrofoam printing plate</u> – A carved surface used to make repeated prints • <u>Brayer</u> – A tool used to roll ink evenly onto the printing plate • <u>Composition</u> – How an artist arranges the Elements of Art (line, shape, form, value, color, space, texture) to create an artwork

MATERIALS

- Selected fairytale or fable
- Pencils
- Copy paper
- Styrofoam sheets
- Dull pencils or ball point pens
- Water based printing ink
- Brayers
- Newsprint or packing paper
- Paper for printing
- Colored pencils or art sticks
- Drying rack or space to lay prints

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Opening/Activating Strategy

Engage (Read & Discuss):

- Read a selected fable or fairytale (e.g., "The Tortoise and the Hare", "The Three Little Pigs", or "The Lion and the Mouse").
- Discuss the story's theme and identify key details that support it.
- Look closely at the illustrations.
 - Ask: How do they support the theme of the story?
- Discuss what a symbol is, and ask students for examples of symbols in everyday life.
- Brainstorm symbols that could represent the theme.
 - Here are some examples:
 - Hard work pays off (e.g., "The Little Red Hen" – Symbol: Grain of wheat or a loaf of bread).
 - Kindness is rewarded (e.g., "Cinderella" – Symbol: A heart or a helping hand).
 - Patience and perseverance (e.g., "The Tortoise and the Hare" – Symbol: A slow-moving turtle or a clock).
 - Bravery and courage (e.g., "Little Red Riding Hood" – Symbol: A shield or a roaring lion).
 - Sharing and generosity (e.g., "Stone Soup" – Symbol: A steaming pot of soup).

Work Session

Explore (Sketch & Plan):

- Discuss how symbols can convey meaning visually.
- Have students sketch possible symbols on paper to represent the theme, focusing on simple yet effective designs.
- Next, have students sketch possible symbols on paper to represent the key details that help develop the theme, focusing on simple yet effective designs.

Create (Printmaking Process):

- **Introduce and demonstrate the printmaking process:**
 - Carving the styrofoam plate:
 - Draw lightly with a pencil before pressing into the styrofoam to avoid mistakes.
 - Use a dull pencil or ballpoint pen to carve designs—press firmly but avoid puncturing all the way through the styrofoam.

- Keep lines simple and bold for clear prints; intricate details may not transfer well.
- Vary line thickness for added depth—thicker lines hold more ink, while thinner lines create subtle details.
- Inking the plate:
 - Roll out a thin, even layer of ink on a tray before applying to the printing plate with a brayer.
 - Then, using the brayer, roll a thin, even layer of ink over the styrofoam plate. Too much ink can make details disappear!
 - Students should take turns rolling ink on the plate while their partner watches for even coverage.
- Printing process:
 - Carefully place the inked plate face down on paper—one student can hold it while the other presses.
 - Use hands or a clean brayer to press firmly and evenly over the entire plate.
 - Lift the plate slowly to reveal the print!
Students may need to repeat this process, experimenting with different amounts of ink and application of pressure when transferring the print.
- Composition:
 - Have students arrange their prints to show how the key details support the theme. For example, students might put the print representing the theme above the prints representing the key details, which might be arranged in a row below the theme.
- Cleanup and reflection:
 - Lay prints flat to dry before handling.
 - Have students compare their prints and discuss what worked well.
 - If needed, allow students to re-ink and try again.
 - Once prints are dry, add color and details with art stix, crayons, or colored pencils.

Classroom Tips:

- *Students can work in pairs to create prints.*
- *Encourage students to work carefully.*
- *Make sure there is a piece of newsprint under each printmaking station.*
- *This process works great as a center. Set up a station and allow student pairs to rotate through to create their prints.*

Extension:

- *Use Book Creator to record short videos discussing the theme of their assigned fairy tale or fable.*
- *Students can also create digital storyboards with apps like Storyboard That to map out key details leading to the theme.*

Closing/Reflection

Reflect (Gallery walk and discussion):

- Display student prints and discuss how each symbol represents the theme and key details.
- Have students write a reflection explaining their design choices and how their symbols connect to the story's theme and key details.

ASSESSMENTS

Formative
Teacher observation during discussions and sketching phase
Summative
Final prints and written reflection explaining their artistic and symbolic choices

DIFFERENTIATION

Accelerated: - Encourage advanced students to incorporate multiple symbols in their design to represent complex themes. - Have students compare and contrast different versions of the same fairytale and compare the theme. Remedial: - Provide sentence stems for theme explanation ("The theme of this story is _____. I know this because _____ and _____"). - Offer pre-drawn templates or examples of symbols for inspiration. - Pair students for peer support during sketching and carving phases.
--

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

What Is Printmaking? The Met Printmaking - Tate Museum
--

This integrated lesson provides differentiated ideas and activities for educators that are aligned to a sampling of standards. Standards referenced at the time of publishing may differ based on each state's adoption of new standards.

Ideas contributed by: Shannon Green. Updated by: Katy Betts.

Revised and copyright: May 2025 @ ArtsNOW