Grade 8: Reading Benchmark

Theme

8.R.1.2: Analyze two or more themes and their development throughout a literary text.

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Benchmark Introduction



Benchmark:

Analyze multiple themes, including universal themes, and their development in a piece of literature.

Definition of Theme

The underlying message or big idea of a talk, book, film, or other work.

When looking for theme(s)

1. There can be more than one **theme** in a text.
2. A **theme** applies to the piece of literature as a whole—not just one part or chapter.
3. A **theme** is not a one- or two-word topic, but a complete thought that communicates the author's message.
4. A **theme** is communicated throughout the text, with repeated images, ideas, or symbols.

Examples of multiple themes

The *Harry Potter* series, set in a magical world of wizards and witches, follows Harry Potter and his friends as they pursue adventures and face dangers, including an encounter with the main villain, Lord Voldemort.

The series' many themes include:

- The loss of innocence
- Good triumphs over evil
- The impact of the past on the present

Definition of Universal Theme

A universal theme is an idea that applies to anyone, anywhere, regardless of cultural differences.

Examples of universal themes

- An individual’s journey to understanding
- An individual’s or a community’s confrontation with nature
- The inevitability of fate

A universal theme in “Cinderella” and many other fairy tales is: Good wins over evil.

Benchmark Skill Routine



How to analyze multiple themes

Read closely, select details, and make observations across a text.

What are the key conflicts? How are they resolved?

How to analyze multiple themes

Focus on the main character:

What does he learn? How does he change?

How to analyze multiple themes

Think about:

What larger messages or ideas (themes) about life, humans, or nature do your specific observations suggest?

How to analyze multiple themes

The end matters:

Pay attention to how the story ends.

- How do the themes develop?
- What other themes emerge?
- Which themes best reflect the novel as a whole?

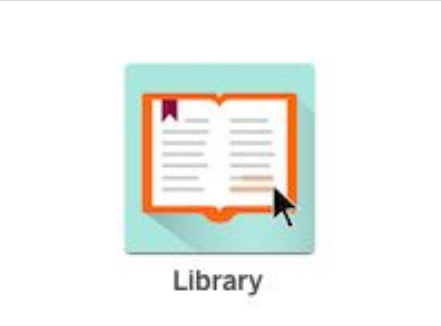
Remember:

1. Read closely and make observations across a text. What are the key conflicts?
2. Focus on the main character. What does he learn and how does he change?
3. Think about what universal messages or ideas your observations suggest.
4. Pay attention to the ending and how themes develop. What other themes emerge?

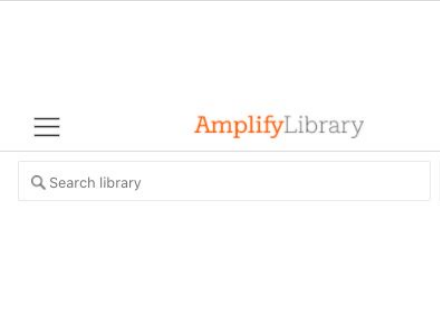
Benchmark in Action: Example of how to analyze multiple themes



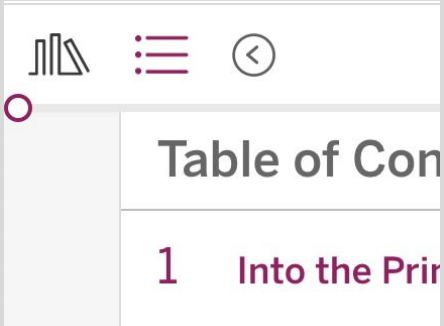
Get ready to read three passages in *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London.



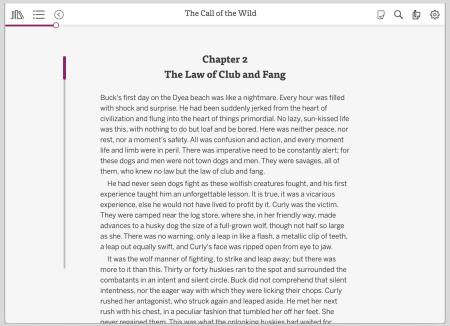
1. Open the Library app.



2. Type “The Call of the Wild” into the search bar. Click on the title of the book to open it.



3. Click on the Table of Contents.



4. Find and go to Chapter 2 “The Law of Club and Fang.” Read paragraphs 1 and 25.

The Call of the Wild

Context for Passages 1 and 2

The Call of the Wild tells the story of Buck, a dog who is kidnapped from his comfortable home and sent to the wild Klondike region in Alaska to become a sled dog. In this passage, Buck is adjusting to his new primitive home.

Read paragraphs 1 and 25 in Chapter 2 “The Law of Club and Fang,” in *The Call of the Wild*.

As you read...

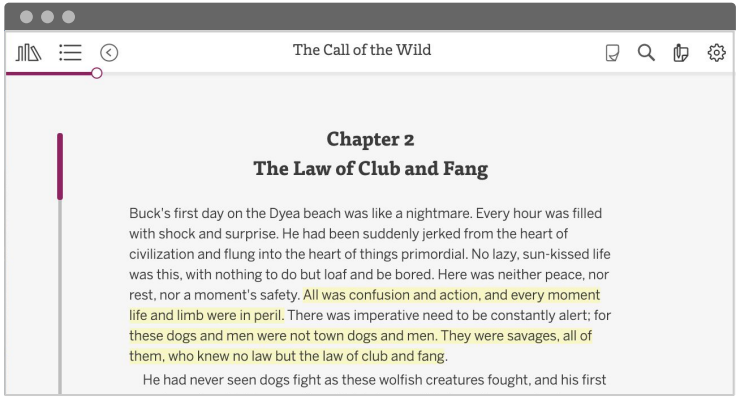
- make observations about key conflicts.
- consider how the main character changes.
- think about what universal messages or ideas your observations suggest.
- pay attention to the ending and how themes develop.

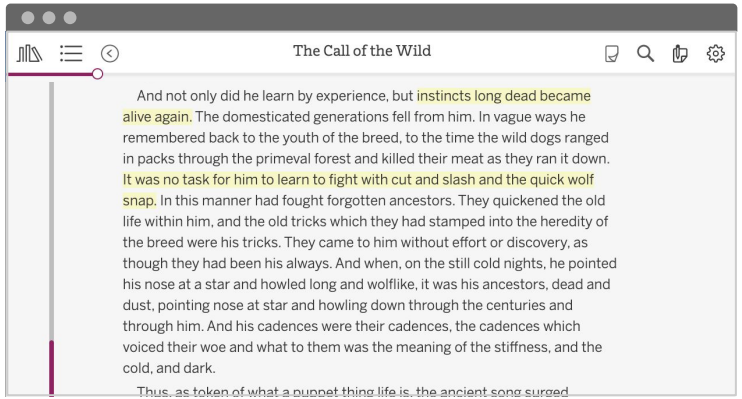
Practice Step 1

Read closely, select details, and make observations across a text.

What are the key conflicts? How are they resolved?

Practice Step 1





Highlight details that reveal conflicts and resolutions:

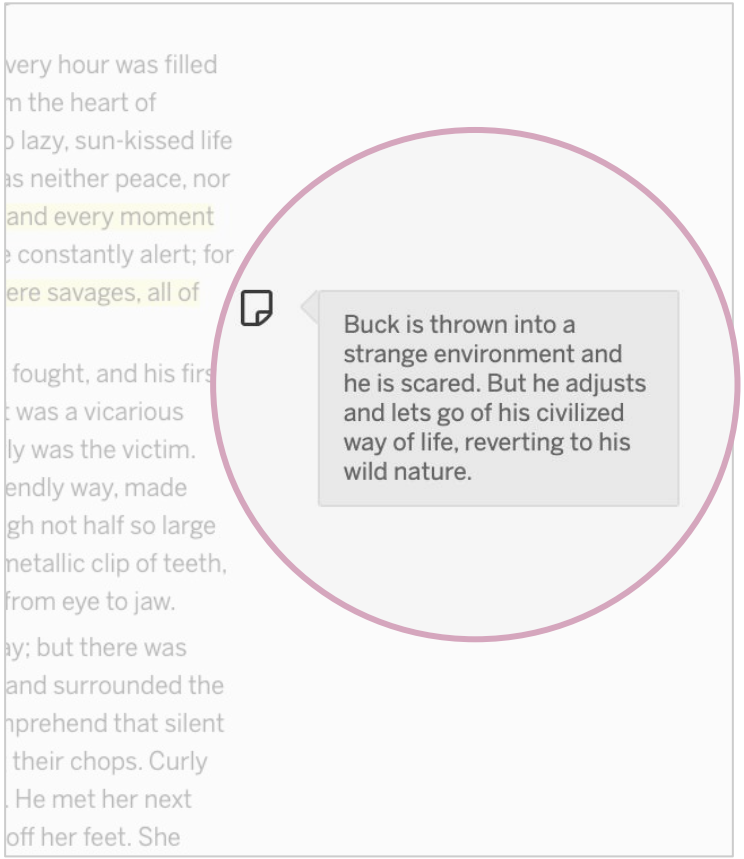
"...every moment life and limb were in peril." (par. 1)

"...these dogs and men were not town dogs and men. They were savages..." (par. 1)

"...instincts long dead became alive again." (par. 25)

"It was no task for him to learn to fight with cut and slash and the quick wolf snap." (par. 25)

Practice Step 1



Annotate your highlights about conflicts and resolutions.

Buck is thrown into a strange environment and he is scared. But he adjusts and lets go of his civilized way of life, reverting to his wild nature.

Practice Step 2

Focus on the main character:

What does he learn? How does he change?

Practice Step 2 Example:

Buck has been forced to focus on the most basic instinct of survival. As the wilder side of his nature takes over, he begins to feel freer and more alive than he ever has before.

Practice Step 3

Connect your observations:

What universal messages or ideas do your observations suggest?

Practice Step 3 Examples:

1. Our instincts are our truest identity.
2. Life is a constant struggle for survival.

Practice Step 4

Pay attention to the ending:

How do the themes develop? What other themes emerge?

How do these themes compare to one another?

Remember

1. Read closely and make observations across a text. What are the key conflicts?
2. Focus on the main character. What does he learn and how does he change?
3. Think about what universal messages or ideas your observations suggest.
4. Pay attention to the ending and how themes develop. What other themes emerge?

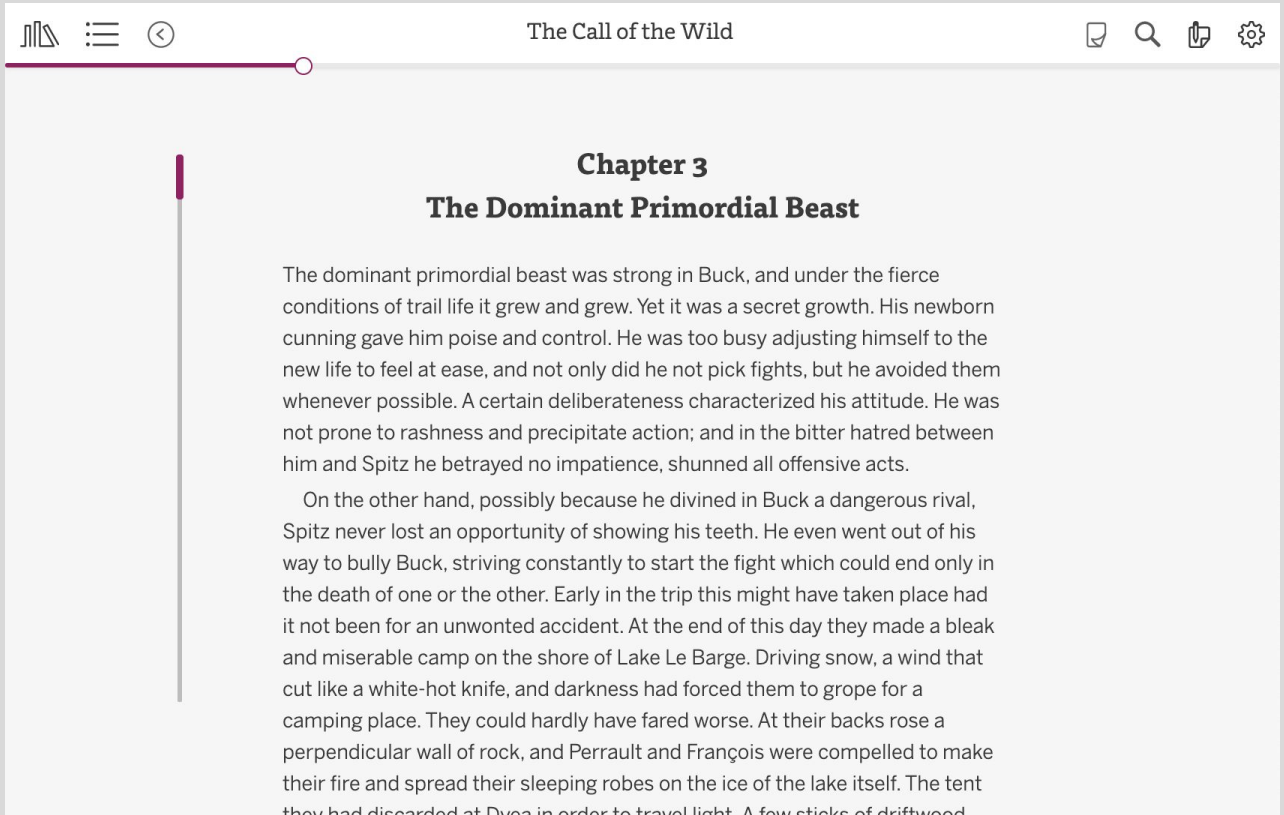
Independent Practice



Benchmark:

Analyze multiple themes, including universal themes, and their development in a piece of literature.

Navigate to Chapter 3 “The Dominant Primordial Beast,” in *The Call of the Wild*. Read paragraph 34.



The Call of the Wild

Context for Passage 3

Buck completes his journey from the domesticated world into the wild.

Practice analyzing multiple themes

Step 1
Read closely, select details, and make observations across the text.
Focus on Buck’s struggle to survive.

Step 2
Focus on the main character. How is Buck changing? What is he learning?

Step 3
Identify larger messages or ideas about life, humans, or nature that are suggested by your observations. Have you discovered any universal themes?

Step 4
Trace these themes to the end of the novel. How do these themes develop and what other themes emerge?

Check for Understanding



Share and Discuss

1. What are three or four observations you made about what the main character learns and how he changes?

Share and Discuss

2. What universal messages or ideas do these observations suggest?

Share and Discuss

3. Trace and analyze the themes that emerge in *The Call of the Wild*.
    - How have the themes you identified developed?
    - How does one theme affect your understanding of another theme?
    - Are any of the themes universal?