Birds in Shadow

Trace how a story's theme changes from beginning to end.

RL.9-10.2 "Determine a theme or central idea of a text, and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail in each paragraph that shows how Mara's idea of a successful play changes, then number the details 1, 2, and 3.

The Shape of the Flock

1. Mara had cut twelve perfect paper birds for the neighborhood's shadow play. Each wing matched the sketch taped above her desk. When her little brother, Eli, brought her a bird with one wing twice as wide as the other, she tucked it into the box of scraps. “It won't fly straight,” she said. Eli shrugged and went to hang the white sheet between two trees. At dusk, Mara lined her birds beside the lamp, ready to tell the story of a flock crossing the sea. She had rehearsed every movement, including the moment the birds would reach shore.

2. Just as the neighbors settled onto the grass, a gust snapped one corner of the sheet loose. The cloth twisted around a branch, leaving a narrow strip for shadows. Mara tried to push her flock through the strip, but their wings overlapped in a dark knot. Eli climbed onto a bench and tied the sheet lower. It held, though its shape now curved like a sail. “We could make them turn,” he whispered, lifting his lopsided bird from the box of scraps. Mara reached for it, then stopped. Behind the lamp, its uneven wings threw a shadow that seemed to bank against the wind.

3. Mara placed Eli's bird at the front of the flock. As he tilted it, she moved the others after it, one by one, across the curved sheet. The birds no longer crossed in a straight line; they dipped, scattered, and gathered again. A child in the audience called out that the birds were finding their way around a storm. Mara hadn't planned a storm, but she let the child name it. When the last bird reached the edge of the light, Mara turned to Eli and asked where the flock should travel next.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do Mara's preparations and her response to Eli's bird introduce a possible theme?

2. How does the loose sheet challenge Mara's original plan? Use two details from the second paragraph.

3. How does the shadow of Eli's bird begin to change Mara's view of his work?

4. What theme has developed by the end? Explain how Mara's response to the child's idea adds to it.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a new ending of four to five sentences starting when the child calls out about the storm. Show Mara making a different choice, then add one sentence explaining how that choice changes the theme developed earlier in the story.

ANSWER KEY

Birds in Shadow

HIGH SCHOOL · RL.9-10.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail in each paragraph that shows how Mara's idea of a successful play changes, then number the details 1, 2, and 3. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do Mara's preparations and her response to Eli's bird introduce a possible theme?	**Mara rehearses every movement and rejects Eli's uneven bird, suggesting that her need for a perfect play keeps her from accepting his contribution.**
2	How does the loose sheet challenge Mara's original plan? Use two details from the second paragraph.	**The sheet leaves only a narrow space, so Mara's birds overlap in a dark knot. Once Eli ties it lower, it curves like a sail instead of forming the flat surface she planned.**
3	How does the shadow of Eli's bird begin to change Mara's view of his work?	**Although Mara said the bird would not fly straight, its uneven wings make it look as if it is turning into the wind. She stops herself from taking it away and later puts it at the front.**
4	What theme has developed by the end? Explain how Mara's response to the child's idea adds to it.	**A shared story can become richer when its creator makes room for others' ideas. Mara lets the child call the unexpected movement a storm, then invites Eli to help decide what happens next.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Mara heard the child call out about the storm, but she shook her head. She pulled the sheet taut and told Eli to put his bird away. Her twelve birds crossed the cloth in a perfect row while the audience grew quiet. Afterward, Eli folded his bird and slipped it into his pocket. This ending changes the theme from learning to share control to showing how the need for perfection can silence other people's ideas.

Accept themes about collaboration, flexibility, or making room for unexpected ideas when students trace them through specific details. For the new ending, look for a changed choice that leads to a clearly explained change in theme.