Trace the Theme

Track how character choices, setting, and plot develop an implied theme.

9.RL.1.A "Explain stated or implied themes, analyzing their development over the course of texts, and the relationship of characters, setting, and plot to those themes."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show Lena making or changing a choice, circle details about the creek, trail, or bridge, and number three plot moments that develop an idea about how people respond to a shared problem. Use your marks to trace how the theme develops.

Alder Creek

1 By late October, the footbridge behind the library had been closed for weeks. Rain had swollen Alder Creek, carrying branches against its loose boards. Each afternoon, Lena took the longer road home, passing the yellow barriers and the creek's brown, rushing water. Her grandfather had taught her to skip stones there, and she disliked seeing the path empty. At a town meeting, adults argued about budgets and permits. Lena sat beside her grandfather, listening, but she said nothing. When the meeting ended, she noticed a notice asking for volunteers to clear the trail after the water fell.

2 Two days later, the creek had shrunk to a noisy ribbon between muddy banks. Lena arrived with gloves, expecting a crowd. Only Mr. Ibarra, the librarian, stood near the barriers with trash bags and a clipboard. For an hour, they pulled cans, plastic bottles, and tangled weeds from the trail. Lena wanted to leave when cold rain began again. Then she saw a small boy watching from his bicycle. She handed him an extra bag, and he began gathering bottle caps. Soon his older sister joined them, followed by Lena's grandfather with a rake. The trail slowly reappeared beneath the mud.

3 The following Saturday, Lena returned before breakfast. She had made a sign listing gloves, bags, and meeting time, then taped copies at the library, market, and bus stop. Twelve people came. They cleared the remaining trail and stacked usable boards beside the bridge for the repair crew. The bridge was still closed, but walkers could reach the creek safely from both sides. As Lena headed home, the boy from the bicycle waved from the path. Lena's grandfather asked whether she planned to attend the next town meeting. This time, Lena said she had ideas about the bridge.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. State a theme of the passage. Explain how two plot events develop that theme.

2. How does the setting of Alder Creek and the closed footbridge help develop the theme? Use two details from the passage.

3. How does Lena change from the beginning to the end of the passage, and how does her change support the theme?

4. Why is it important that the bridge is still closed at the end? Explain what this plot detail suggests about the theme.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a different literary text you have read. In exactly four sentences, state a theme and explain how two plot events, a character's response, and the setting develop that theme.

ANSWER KEY

Trace the Theme

GRADE 9 · 9.RL.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that show Lena making or changing a choice, circle details about the creek, trail, or bridge, and number three plot moments that develop an idea about how people respond to a shared problem. Use your marks to trace how the theme develops. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	State a theme of the passage. Explain how two plot events develop that theme.	**A theme is that shared problems can improve when individuals choose to act. Lena first volunteers to clear the trail, then organizes more people to return and help, showing how one person's action can lead to community effort.**
2	How does the setting of Alder Creek and the closed footbridge help develop the theme? Use two details from the passage.	**The flooded creek and damaged bridge create a problem that affects the community, while the muddy, trash-covered trail gives volunteers a concrete task. When the trail becomes safe again, the setting shows the result of their work even though the bridge still needs repair.**
3	How does Lena change from the beginning to the end of the passage, and how does her change support the theme?	**At first, Lena listens silently at the town meeting and only notices the volunteer notice. By the end, she posts signs, brings people together, and plans to share ideas at the next meeting, showing that she has become an active problem-solver.**
4	Why is it important that the bridge is still closed at the end? Explain what this plot detail suggests about the theme.	**The closed bridge shows that the community has not solved everything at once. The volunteers' work still makes the trail safer, suggesting that meaningful change can begin with smaller, continued efforts.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In The Giver by Lois Lowry, a theme is that a safe-looking society can harm people when it removes choice and truth. As Jonas receives memories and learns that release means death, he recognizes the cruelty hidden by Sameness. His decision to leave with Gabriel shows his change from an obedient Receiver to someone willing to risk safety for another person. The highly controlled community setting develops the theme because its rules prevent citizens from seeing what they have lost.

Accept other clearly stated or implied themes if students support them with accurate passage evidence. Responses should connect theme development to plot events and should explain the role of character choices and setting rather than merely list details.