



Close reading plan

“Stray” from Every Living Thing: Stories by Cynthia Rylant

Created by Tawana Graham-Douglas, 2014 Connecticut Dream Team teacher

What makes this text complex?			
Text and Author	Stray from Every Living Thing, Stories by Cynthia Rylant, Cynthia Rylant	Where to Access Text	Google Books Online
Text Description			
<p>“Stray” is realistic fiction and is about a little girl named Doris who finds a stray dog. The text’s theme is about what makes people change and grow. Throughout the text, the author focuses on one’s ability to change and grow while using imagery to convey mood and character traits. The story language is straightforward and easy to understand and contains situational irony.</p>			
Quantitative			
Lexile and Grade Level	870, 4 th Grade	Text Length	1,051 words
Qualitative			
Meaning/Central Ideas		Text Structure/Organization	
Theme of the text (people/characters can have experiences that transform their feelings, ideas, and actions/redemptive relationships between humans and other animals) is moderately complex and conveyed with some subtlety.		No graphics are used. Text is organized in a slightly complex, clear chronological structure. Dialogue and imagery are used.	
Prior Knowledge Demands		Language Features	
The text explores a single theme and the experiences portrayed are everyday and common to most readers. Contains no references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements.		Text uses a conversational, matter-of-fact tone. Vocabulary is primarily contemporary with some references that may be unfamiliar. (ex. Automobile, warehouse, etc.)	
Vocabulary			
Tier Two Words (General academic vocabulary)		Tier Three Words (Domain-specific words)	
<p>“Words that are far more likely to appear in written texts than in speech. [They] often represent subtle or precise ways to say relatively simple things—saunter instead of walk, for example.” (CCSS ELA Appendix A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abandoned Exhausted Timidly Starvation 		<p>“[Tier Three words]...are specific to a domain or field of study (lava, carburetor, legislature, circumference, aorta) and key to understanding a new concept within a text.” (CCSS ELA Appendix A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Tier Three words found in this text. 	
Potential Reader/Task Challenges			
As the story progresses, the characters have thoughts and experiences that transform them as they change and grow. Determining why the transformation takes place may be somewhat challenging for students including those reading below grade level.			

Text-dependent questions		
Question	Standard alignment	Page of this document
Drawing on specific details from the text, describe in depth how the main characters' feelings differ about the stray at the onset of the story.	RL.4.1 RL.4.3	4
Drawing on specific details from the text, describe the parallels that can be drawn between Mr. Lacey's personality and the author's description of the setting.	RL.4.3 RL.4.4	7
Describe what Mr. Lacey means when he says, "I wouldn't leave an ant in that place...", and explain how his statement reveals a change in his attitude at the beginning of the story.	RL.4.1 RL.4.3	10
How does Cynthia Rylant's development of the character Doris help readers to determine the kind of person Doris is? How are Doris' actions and spoken words used to help them reader make this determination?	RL.4.2	14
Using details from the text, describe the author's message/theme in "Stray."	RL. 4.2	17

Target Standards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RL.4.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information. • RL.4.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly. • RL.4.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. • RL.4.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

Question 1	
Question #1	Drawing on specific details from the text, describe in depth how the main characters' feelings differ about the stray at the onset of the story.
Standard(s) covered:	RL.4.1 Refer to details and examples in the text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. RL.4.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story, or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).
Example response that meets standard	Look-fors
<p>At the onset of the story, Doris feels differently than her parents about keeping the stray. As soon as she saw the pup, she called to him by saying, "Come on, Pooch." When she took the pup inside, she "hugged the puppy hard against her." Her parents didn't want to keep the dog. For example, Mrs. Lacey asked, "Where did that come from?" and her father added, "I don't know where it came from, but I know where it's going..." referring to the pound. From what the characters say and how they act, I can summarize that Doris likes the dog and wants to keep him, while her parents don't want him in the house and her dad wants to take him to the pound.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurately identifies the feelings of all three characters at the beginning of the story. • Explains how the character's feelings differ. • Uses specific examples of each characters' words or actions that expresses how they feel about the stray dog.
If students are struggling to answer the text-dependent question, use this follow-up plan for modeling and practice:	
Objective	In this lesson you will learn how to summarize the feelings of characters by using specific evidence from the text to support your answer.
Prior knowledge to review	Describe characters' feelings in a story and explain how their actions contribute the sequence of events. (RL.3.3)

Steps to achieve objective	Think aloud for direct instruction
1) Reread portions of the text and look for specific evidence to answer the question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This question is asking me to use specific details from the text to describe how the main character feels about the stray at the onset of the story. I know that the onset means the beginning, so that's where I'm going to look first. • From reading Cynthia Rylant's story "Stray", I know Doris loved the dog, and her mother and father didn't want it inside the house. As a matter of fact, her father would have taken the dog to the pound that very first day if the streets were clear of snow. Now I need to go back and look for evidence. I remember that the author wrote about the family's feelings at the beginning of the story. • I remember earlier on in the story, the author shared how each family member felt about the stray. On page 43, the author shares how Doris and Mr. and Mrs. Lacey responded to the stray. I need to reread what each character either did or said in reference to the dog.
2) Ask yourself, "How can I summarize each character's feelings?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Here it says Doris, "hugged the puppy hard against her..." If she was hugging the dog so tightly, that must mean she wanted to keep him and take care of him. • Mrs. Lacey asked, "Where did that come from?" Well, she didn't even refer to the animal as a dog. She just called it "that" as if it were something disgusting that she didn't want in the house. The author also adds that Mrs. Lacey "grudgingly let Doris feed it scraps" and that she considered giving the dog table food as throwing it away. I can tell from her words and actions that she doesn't like the dog and doesn't want it in the house. • Her father added, "I don't know where it came from, but I know where it's going..." referring to the pound. From what the characters say and how they act, I can summarize that Doris likes the dog and wants to keep him, while her parents don't want him in the house and her dad wants to take him to the pound.
3) Construct a response using evidence from the text to answer the question in your own words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have text based evidence about how all the characters feel about the stray dog, now I have to write a response. I will begin by explaining how Doris felt differently about the dog than her parents. I'll use an example of what the author said to support Doris' feelings. I will do the same for Mr. and Mrs. Lacey. • I think I will reread my response and add specific transitional language from our informational writing unit. I'll use a transitional phrase like, "for example", like I used during informational writing because this is kind of like informational writing because I am explaining something.

Extension and practice

- If students are having difficulty finding evidence of each characters' feelings, they can work with a partner or in a small group to go back into the text and, one character at a time, read what was said or what the character did that may give clues about that person's feelings.
- If students are having difficulty comparing feelings, have them use a Venn Diagram or Matrix chart to record how each character feels and then spend time comparing and contrasting those feelings.
- If students appears to be able to find the supporting details, their learning can be extended by inviting them to analyze the details that the author has given about the stray do to determine how she may be feeling throughout the story in response to her experiences in the house.

What next?

For additional practice, with students or for students' independent work, apply this learning objective and set of steps to how to summarize the feelings of characters by using specific evidence from the text to support your answer. (RL.4.1 and 4.3)

See more examples of how to teach (RL.4.1 and RL.4.3)

Objective: In this lesson you will learn how to summarize the feelings of characters by using specific evidence from the text to support your answer in the short story "Stray" by Cynthia Rylant.

1. Reread portions of the text and look for specific evidence to answer the question.
2. Ask yourself, "How can I summarize each character's feelings?"
3. Construct a response using evidence from the text to answer the question in your own words.

LearnZillion:
[Plan a written response to text using information from the text.](#)
[Describing an event using a character's words or actions](#)
[Describe a change in a character](#)
[Describe a character using evidence from what the character does, says, or think.](#)

Question 2

Question #2	Drawing on specific details from the text, describe the parallels that can be drawn between Mr. Lacey's personality and the author's description of the setting.	
Standard(s) covered:	RL.4.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story, or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions). RL.4.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).	
	Example response that meets standard	Look-fors
	<p>The short story "Stray" takes place during the winter. Author, Cynthia Rylant describes the setting with icicles hanging from the eaves of the house and snow drifts that have swallowed up automobiles. By using words like icicle and snow drifts, the author prepares us for the coldness Doris' father will greet the stray with. She describes the setting as one that makes the stray shiver and tremble. We soon learn that Mr. Lacey does not like the stray and wants to take it to the pound as soon as the snow clears.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the setting. • Specific words that describes Mr. Lacey's personality. • Explain how the words are used to connect the father's personality with the words describing the setting.
If students are struggling to answer the text-dependent question, use this follow-up plan for modeling and practice:		
Objective	In this lesson you will learn how to describe characters by comparing character traits with specific words from the text that describes the setting.	
Prior knowledge to review	Describe characters in a story and determine the meaning of words and phrases.	

Steps to achieve objective	Think aloud for direct instruction
1) Reread the text and locate specific words that describe the setting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I know that authors sometimes use indirect characterizations, or describe characters indirectly. They do this to give their readers more information about characters by connecting their characters' traits to the words used to describe other parts of the story like the setting. First I have to reread the question and think about what parallel means. Remember that when something is parallel in a text, it means that they relate in some way, and share similarities. I am going to be looking for those kinds of words that describe the setting. While I do that, I want to keep in mind that these words should also relate to Mr. Lacey's characteristics and personality traits. I notice here in the first paragraph that the author uses words to help me picture and feel that it is wintertime and that it is cold outside. She writes, "Icicles hung three feet or more from the eaves of the house and snowdrifts swallowed up automobiles..." Based on this description, I know that it is wintertime and it is cold.
2) Reread the text and find evidence of characters' thoughts, actions, and feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author describes the setting as cold, so I am going to be looking for clues about Mr. Lacey's thoughts, actions, and feelings and underline them. I want to keep in mind that the phrases I'm looking for should show that Mr. Lacey is a "cold" person. When a person is cold, they may be rude, respond in an unkind way, or have a mean tone in their voice. Oh, I notice on the second page of the story that Mr. Lacey says, "I don't know where it came from, but I know for sure where it is going." He seems to be saying this in an unkind, almost rude way and this leads me to believe that he does not want the dog at his house and he has plans to take it to the pound when the snow clears. I also notice that on page 44, the family is having dinner and Doris is talking about the dog. Doris is trying to get her parents to consider letting her keep the dog so she tells them what a "good" dog the stray is. She is hoping that they agree with her, but they say nothing. Doris goes on to tell how smart the dog is and how it doesn't cause any trouble. But her mother and father continue to ignore her. This continues to give me the idea that Doris' father is as cold as the weather outside. Cold means that he is not as loving as he should be. You would think that a loving father would at least listen to his daughter and respond to her.
3) Identify a connection between the author's description of the setting and the words and actions the author used to tell us about the characters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Now I need to write a response that connects Cynthia Rylant's description of the setting with the thoughts, actions, and feelings of Mr. Lacey. The author describes the setting as wintry and cold. She refers to the ice and snow evoking feelings of coldness and lack of warmth. These feelings foreshadow the father's feelings of coldness towards the dog and lack of warmth to his own daughter Doris.

Extension and practice

- If students are having difficulty finding words to describe the setting, work with them to read a few sentences at a time. While reading more slowly and carefully, ask them to look for words that explicitly tell you about the weather and words that imply what the setting looks and feels like. Then have them chart the words and the feelings on a T-Chart.
- If students are able to draw the parallels between the setting and the father's character traits, invite them to explore the mother's words, thoughts, and actions as well.

What next?

For additional practice, with students or for students' independent work, apply this learning objective and set of steps to other literature to describe a character in depth. (RL.4.3)

See more examples of how to describe character in depth (RL.4.3)

Objective: In this lesson you will how to describe characters by comparing character traits with specific words from the text that describes the setting.

1. Reread the text and locate specific words that describe the setting.
2. Reread the text and find evidence of characters' thoughts, actions, and feelings.
3. Identify a connection between the author's description of the setting and the words and actions the author used to tell us about the characters.

Inferring how and why characters change – [Read, Write, Think](#)
Character Analysis - [RISD](#)

Question 3

Question 3	
Question #3	Describe what Mr. Lacey means when he says, "I wouldn't leave an ant in that place...", and explain how his statement reveals a change in his attitude at the beginning of the story.
Standard(s) covered:	RL.4.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. RL.4.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story, or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).
Example response that meets standard	
<p>When Mr. Lacy says, "I wouldn't leave an ant in that place," he is referring to not being able to leave the stray in the dog pound. He describes the pound as the, "Worst looking place I've ever seen." Although he was eager to get the dog out of their house, once he went to drop her off at the pound, it was such a terrible place, and he felt such compassion for the pup he just couldn't leave her there.</p> <p>The compassion he feels at the end of the story, differs greatly from his feelings at the beginning. At the onset of the story, the only thing stopping him from taking the stray dog to the pound was the snow blocked streets. He appeared cold and uncaring at the beginning of the story and his compassion at the end of the story comes as a surprise to the family.</p>	Look-fors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the correct statement from Mr. Lacey • Explain Mr. Lacey's statement • Identify his feelings at the beginning of the story • Contrast the difference in his feeling from the onset to the conclusion of the story • Summary of the character's feelings 	
If students are struggling to answer the text-dependent question, use this follow-up plan for modeling and practice:	
Objective	In this lesson you will learn how to infer a character's changing feelings by examining his/her thoughts, words, and actions.
Prior knowledge to review	Describe characters in a story and determine the meaning of words and phrases. (RL.3.3)

Steps to achieve objective	Think aloud for direct instruction
1) Reread the portion of the story that includes the quote to infer the meaning of the quote.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know that when I am answering questions about a quote, I should find the exact quote in the story and think about how it fits with the rest of the story. • Here is the quote right here on page 47. I will reread it. Mr. Lacey says that it was the worst looking place and the smell, “ ...was enough to knock you down.” I believe that means it smelled horrible. I know that when I smell something horrible, like a dead skunk or old garbage, that I feel like it could really knock me over. • He then adds that they give an animal six days to live and then they, “kill it with some kind of shot.” This tells me that Mr. Lacey thought the place was unfit for the little puppy. He sounds shocked that they would kill the animal in six days. I wonder if he thought the people at the pound would be able to find the puppy a home and not have to kill it. Either way, he thought it was horrible and decided not to leave the puppy there.
2) Reread portions of the text that describe the character’s words and actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the beginning of the story Mr. Lacey infers that he will take the stray dog to the pound the moment Doris brings it in the door. He says, “I don’t know where it came from, but I know for sure where it is going.” This tells me that he has plans to take the dog to the pound. • At the dinner table, when Doris tries to make a plea for why they should keep the good, smart, no trouble dog, Mr. Lacey appears to ignore her by not responding. This tells me that he still plans to take the dog to the pound. • Doris makes one final appeal to her parents by simply begging, “Please.” Doris heard her father slam the trunk of the car shut and the car travel down the road. Here, Doris’ father appears to continue to ignore her pleas and he is determined the get rid of the dog. • Mr. Lacey’s actions and words reveal that his plan all along was to get rid of the stray and we find out after reading half of the story that this is because the family could not financially afford another mouth to feed. • As I think about Mr. Lacey’s actions, I begin to think if he is more practical than uncaring. I also begin to think that maybe he is really listening to Doris when he appears to be ignoring her.
3) Determine how the character’s words and actions reflect a shift in their feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A heartbroken Doris cried herself to sleep after her father left and didn’t hear him when he returned. When she woke up, she went into the kitchen. To her surprise, her father told her to, “...feed that mutt before it dies of starvation.” • In the beginning Mr. Lacey was determined to remove the dog from their home as soon as the streets cleared. At the end of the story, he brings the pup back home and explains that it was because of the conditions at the pound. He explained the pound as the “worst looking place I’ve ever seen. Ten dogs to a cage. Smell was enough to knock you down. And they give an animal six days to live. Then they kill it with some kind of a shot. I wouldn’t leave an ant in that place. So I brought the dog back.” This shows me a shift in Mr. Lacey’s feelings about keeping the dog because after he saw how horrible the conditions were in the pound, he had so much compassion for the stray pup that he couldn’t leave her to die in such a dreadful place. I can infer that his knowledge of how much his daughter loved the dog played into his decision also.

Extension and practice

- If a student is having difficulty identifying the characters feelings, have them think about what Doris' father said and how that may tell you about what he was thinking.
- Allow students to practice by choosing other short stories in Every Living Thing. They can extend their learning by comparing and contrasting the changes in character as they go through each story. Use "Spaghetti", "Shells", "A Pet", and/or "Papa's Parrot."

What next?

For additional practice, with students or for students' independent work, apply this learning objective and set of steps to describe a character in depth. (RL.4.3)

See more examples of how to teach how to describe a character more in depth. (RL.4.3)

Objective: In this lesson you will learn how to infer a character's changing feelings by examining his/her thoughts, words, and actions.

1. Reread the portion of the story that includes the quote to infer the meaning of the quote.
2. Reread portions of the text that describe the character's actions.
3. Determine how the character's words and actions reflect a shift in their feelings.

LearnZillion lesson - [Learning about a character from their words and actions](#)
 Scholastic Lesson - [Understanding Character/Character analysis](#)
 Read, Write, Think, -[How and why characters change](#)

Question 4

Question #4	How does Cynthia Rylant’s development of the character Doris help readers to determine the kind of person Doris is? How are Doris’ actions and spoken words used to help them reader make this determination?	
Standard(s) covered:	RL.4.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story, or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character’s thoughts, words, or actions).	
Example response that meets standard		Look-fors
<p>In the story “Stray”, the author Cynthia Rylant, introduces us to a girl named Doris and then uses words and actions to help us learn more about the main character. We learn that Doris is responsible, caring, and smart. I know Doris is responsible because her parents have given her the chore of shoveling after a severe snow storm and that is what she is doing as the story opens. Later in the story we find that Doris is more responsible and caring because she is the one charged with caring for the stray pup. Doris feeds and plays with the dog.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of Doris’s character • Evidence for the traits listed • Character’s influence on other character(s)
<p>If students are struggling to answer the text-dependent question, use this follow-up plan for modeling and practice:</p>		
Objective	In this lesson you will learn how to describe a character by using evidence from the characters actions and words and investigate whether or not that characters actions affect the actions of other characters.	
Prior knowledge to review	RL.3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of the text, referring explicitly to the text as a basis for the answers. RL.3.3 Describe characters in a story.	

Steps to achieve objective	Think aloud for direct instruction
1) Re-read the text and look for evidence of what the character says and does.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know that Doris is an important character in this story. After all, she is the one that found the stray and brought it inside the house. • Maybe I should start right there, right at the beginning when she first sees the dog; that will give me some information about what kind of a person she is. • I notice that at the very beginning Doris is out shoveling snow that is piled up very high. This makes her seem rather responsible because she has chores and she is obeying her parents by doing her chores. I also notice that as soon as she sees the stray, she goes right up to it and seems unafraid of getting her. She picks it up and begins to talk to it. This makes me think she is a brave, kind person that likes animals. I also notice that even though she knows her parents are against it, she tries to convince them to keep the stray. While at the dinner table, Doris tells her parents, “She is a good dog..., she’s not much trouble, I figure she is really smart, I can teach her things.” This tells me that Doris really cares about the dog and even though her parents are ignoring her argument while at the dinner table, she is smart and tries to think of reasons why her parents might let her keep it.
2) Think, “What does this tell me about the character?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doris’ actions, such as, approaching the dog, picking her up, and taking care of her tell me that Doris is a caring and compassionate child. • Doris’ words, such as, “She is a good dog..., she’s not much trouble...”, tell me that she is smart and brave as she tries to construct an argument that may persuade her parents and even though she know it may upset her father, she still tries to stand up for keeping the dog. • Doris’ actions and words tell me she is a brave, caring and smart child who has come to love the stray so much that she is willing to risk her father being upset with her to keep the puppy.
3) Think, “Does the characters words and actions affect other characters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As I think about Doris’ words and actions, I think about the dinner scene. Usually when an author includes such scenes, they are important and we should take note. I notice that the dinner scene begins with an explanation of why Doris’ parents were against keeping the dog. Cynthia Rylant writes, “She knew her parents wouldn’t let her keep it, that her father made so little money any pets were out of the question, and that the pup would definitely go to the pound when the weather cleared.” The author allows us to get a glimpse into the thinking of Doris’ parents and why keeping the stray was almost impossible: the was a hardship; the family was poor and couldn’t afford another mouth to feed even if that mouth belonged to a dog. • With this in mind, we enter the dinner scene wherein Doris is sharing the virtues of the pup to coax her parents into letting it remain. Let’s look closer at what she said, “She’s a good dog, isn’t she?”, “She’s not much trouble.”, “I like her.” I figure she is real smart...”, and “I could teach her things.” And even though Doris’ parents seem to ignore her, they still learn how much she has come to care for the dog. This is important because, as we learn at the end of the story, Mr. Lacey brings the dog home and allows Doris to keep it. Even though Mr. Lacey states that the conditions of the pound are horrible, we learn that he was also thinking about Doris’ feelings when he says, “You’d better feed your dog. I figure it’s looking for you.” This again tells us that he is aware of how much Doris’ cares for the dog and how much the dog cares for Doris. • From this we can conclude that Doris’s actions somewhat influenced her father’s change of heart and his decision to bring the puppy home.

Extension and practice

- If students are having difficulty finding evidence of the character’s words and actions, reread the text in chunks and use a highlighter or sticky to make note of what the character does or says.
- If students are having difficulty answering “What does this tell me about the character?”, invite the student to use/create a graphic organizer that focuses just on that character. Invite them to think about the character’s personality and think of words that would describe the character. It may also be helpful to provide students with a word bank of character traits to choose from.
- If students are able to describe Doris’ character with ease, encourage them to try to do the same for other characters in the story and write a short story using those characters as main characters and incorporating their traits.

What next?

For additional practice, with students or for students’ independent work, apply this learning objective and set of steps to describe characters in depth using evidence from their actions and words. (RL.4.3)

See more examples of how to teach students to describe characters in depth. (RL.4.3)

Objective: In this lesson you will learn how to describe a character using evidence from the characters actions and words and investigate whether or not that characters actions affect the actions of other characters.

Re-read the text and look for evidence of what the character says and does.
 Think, “What does this tell me about the character?”
 Think, “Does the characters words and actions affect other characters.”

LearnZillion - [Describing a character based on dialogue.](#)
 Scholastic - [What a Character!](#)

Question 5

Question #5 Using details from the text, explain Cynthia Rylant’s message/theme in “Stray.”

Standard(s) covered: RL.4.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from the details in the text; summarize the text.

Example response that meets standard

“Stray” is a story about how different experiences can cause characters to change and grow. I know this because in “Stray”, Doris’ father Mr. Lacey, changes from being someone who appears to be cold, mean, and uncaring, into a caring person who develops feelings for the stray and does not allow the stray to be placed in an unsuitable pound. In the beginning of the story, Mr. Lacey indicates that the dog will be going to the pound as soon as the roads are clear of snow. At the end of the story, Mr. Lacey surprises Doris by bringing the dog home from the pound. Her father explains to her, that the pound was as the, “Worst looking place I’ve ever seen....I wouldn’t leave an ant in that place.” He did not leave the dog and this shows me that Mr. Lacey has changed and is more caring than he was at the beginning of the story. Mr. Lacey’s experience with the dog, and his daughter’s love for the pup, softened his heart quite a bit and made him feel more caring towards the homeless pup.

Look-fors

- Names a character(s) from the story (that changes).
- Sites specific example(s) of how the character(s) change throughout the story.
- Connects the transformation to the big idea/theme of the entire story.

If students are struggling to answer the text-dependent question, use this follow-up plan for modeling and practice:

Objective In this lesson, you will learn how to determine the theme of a text by examining key details to summarize how character(s) grow/change/evolve throughout a text.

Prior knowledge to review
 RL.2.2 Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.
 RL.3.2 Recount stories including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures: determine the central message, lesson, or moral, and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.
 RL.3.3. Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

Steps to achieve objective	Think aloud for direct instruction
1) Re-read the text and using specific details summarize the characters' feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · I notice that the question asks me to explain the theme. First, I should think about what theme means. Oh yes, I remember from our previous lessons that it means the big idea or message that the author is trying to communicate to his/her reader. In the past we have talked about how to find the big idea by studying the plot and what happens in a text. But I know that we can learn about the message in a story by re-reading the text and paying close attention to what the character says to other characters and his/her actions. · As I skim the text I notice that Mr. Lacey has plans to take the dog to the pound as soon as the roads are clear of snow. I remember from Lesson 1 that on page 43 he said, "I don't know where it came from, but I know for sure where it's going" referring to the dog pound. And it was only because he couldn't get through the snow covered streets, the text says, he agreed to let it sleep in the basement. I also notice that Doris would like to keep the stray dog because she is taking such good care of it and she called him a "good dog". Even though she knew her parents wouldn't let her keep it because her father made so little money, she tried to convince them anyway. · In other lessons I was able to use the characters words and actions to infer how they each felt about the stray dog. As I discovered, Doris loved the dog and her mother and father grew to care for the dog, even to the extent that Doris' father didn't leave the stray at the pound. From that summary I noticed that it was Mr. Lacey that had the most dramatic transformation. He went from insisting that the dog was going to be taken to the pound when the snow cleared to wanting Doris to keep the dog at the end of the story. · At the onset of the story, Mr. Lacey declares, "I don't know where it (the dog) came from, but I know where it's going..." referring to the pound. From what he said and how he acted, we summarize that he didn't want the dog, but we also noticed that by the end of the story he explains that he says, "I wouldn't leave an ant in that place, so I brought the dog back." · Since Mr. Lacey has the most dramatic transformation, I wonder if Cynthia Rylant wants us to focus on him and why he has changed so significantly. Let's focus on Mr. Lacey.
2) Ask, "What experiences did the character have that may have caused him/her to change?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Oh look, on page 44 it says that Doris didn't even name the dog because she knew she wouldn't be able to keep him because her father made so little money. But you can tell that she loved about the dog because she played with and cared for him. · On page 45, I think Doris thinks she can possibly persuade her parent to let her keep the dog as she explains how "good" she is. Doris asserts, "She's not much trouble...I can teach her things..." · This is one of the experiences that Mr. Lacey has that could influence his change of heart. He can begin to see how attached his daughter had become, as well as, acknowledge how well behaved the stray has been over the past 7 to 8 days. · But I think maybe the biggest influence on Mr. Lacey was his trip to the pound. He described it as the "Worst looking place I've ever seen. Ten dogs to a cage, Smell was enough to knock you down, and they give an animal six days to live. Then they kill it with some kind of shot." He then goes on to explain that he couldn't leave her in a place like that and so he brought the stray dog back home to Doris.

<p>3) Construct a response thinking, “What does the author want me to learn? What can we learn from characters in the story?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am thinking, “What does the author want me to learn from Mr. Lacey?” • I think she wants us to learn that characters can change based on their experiences. Mr. Lacey’s experience with the dog softened his heart quite a bit and made him feel more caring towards the homeless pup. Now we might say that he did it because he loved his daughter, and that might be true. Cynthia Rylant dedicates a page and a half to the description of the dog’s behavior and why the dog could be a good pet. The author’s inclusion of this information provides evidence of its importance and it helps to support the conclusion that Mr. Lacey’s experience with the dog, Doris’ argument for why they should consider keeping it, and Mr. Lacey’s visit to the pound, all influenced his transformation.
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Extension and practice

- Students may have difficulty understanding theme. It may be easier for them to understand the big ideas of fables and fairy tales. Begin instruction with those and once students are able to identify the author’s message more consistently, have them reread this text.
- For students who need a little more guidance in finding the theme, provide them with a simpler, student-friendly guide for determining theme.
- Extension – Have students write their own version of “Stray” or a story about how a major character transforms by the end of the story.

What next?

For additional practice, with students or for students’ independent work, apply this learning objective and set of steps to determine the theme of a story. (RL.4.2)

See more examples of how to teach students how to determine theme. (RL.4.2)

Objective: In this lesson, you will learn how to determine the theme of a text by examining key details to summarize how character(s) grow/change/evolve throughout a text.

1. Re-read the text and using specific details summarize the characters’ feelings. (Lesson 1)
2. Ask, “What experiences did the character have that may have caused him/her to change?”
3. Construct a response thinking, “What does the author want me to learn? What can we learn from characters in the story?”

LearnZillion:

[Determine the theme of a story](#)

[Determine the theme of a drama](#)

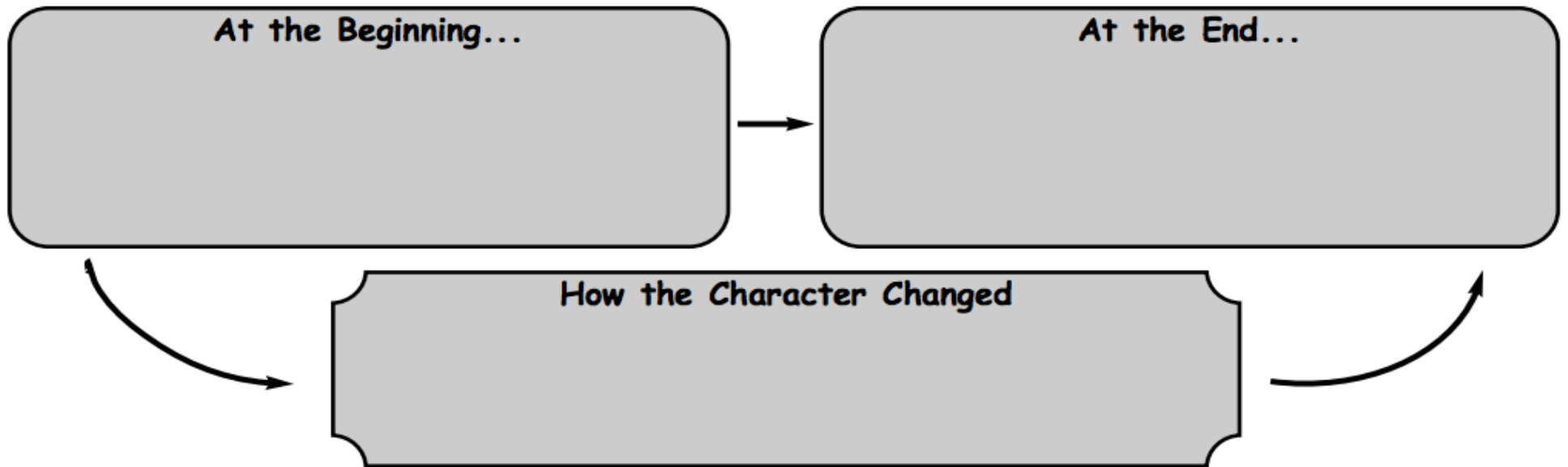
[Determining the Big Ideas of Text](#)

Student's Name: _____

HOW AND WHY CHARACTERS CHANGE

Title of Text: _____ Author: _____

Character's Name: _____

Directions: Provide evidence from the story to support your conclusions.

Name: _____ Date: _____

What a Character!

DIRECTIONS:

1. As you read, think about the main character's personality. Choose one trait to describe him or her. (See the idea box for suggestions.)
2. After reading, draw the character in the box below using details from the story to help you.
3. Then, write about the character's personality below.

Idea Box

Clever, generous,
dishonest, friendly,
selfish, loyal,
outgoing, mean,
brave

Visualize It

Sketch the character here.

**Write About It**

I think the character named

is a _____

person. I think this because in

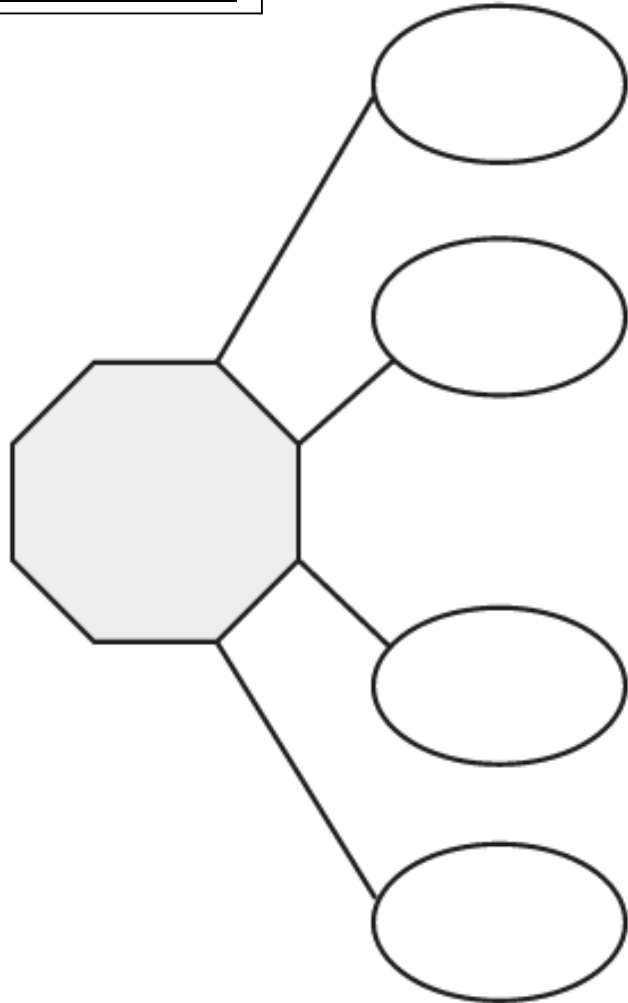
the story he/she _____

Character Map

Name: _____

Date: _____

Section Title: _____



An empty rectangular text box with rounded corners, intended for writing notes related to the first oval in the character map.



An empty rectangular text box with rounded corners, intended for writing notes related to the second oval in the character map.



An empty rectangular text box with rounded corners, intended for writing notes related to the third oval in the character map.



An empty rectangular text box with rounded corners, intended for writing notes related to the fourth oval in the character map.