

USING THE THEME CHART

A great way to assess how well and accurately your students' analysis skills are is to run them through the theme chart.

It takes the steps of the analysis process and puts it down on paper.

You can do this with any text, but we've found it works best with picture books (obviously), short stories, and short films. However, it could be applied to a longer whole class novel as well. The first time we do this in our classrooms is after they've gotten a handle on truisms and the entire analysis process. We usually watch a short films like "Strange Beasts" or "Wire Cutters," both of which are more suited for middle schoolers.

Included here is a theme chart filled in for the book *Sweetie* by Andrea Zull.

In column one, students summarize a piece of text. Focus only on the important stuff—not all the fluff.

Theme Chart for *Sweetie* by Andrea Zull

Student Name: Stephen Brisenõ
Date: 3/11/23

Instructions: Read the instructions for each column and fill out as best as you can. Make sure you meet all the requirements.

SUMMARY	BIG IDEAS	TRUISMS/THEMES	EVIDENCE
Summarize the story. Only include those characters, events, and plot points are the MOST important. Write using complete sentences. MINIMUM 50 WORDS. 30 points	What big ideas does the story grapple with? What popped out to you as a big idea? Write a list below. MINIMUM 5 WORDS. 10 points	What is the author trying to say about life through this story? Write two truisms, both using complete sentences, including a big idea word from your list to the left. COMPOSE TWO. 40 points	How do you know that your truism connects with the story? Prove it by providing evidence from the text. MINIMUM 30 WORDS 20 points
<p><i>Sweetie is a bit unique - even for a naked mole rat. She sees the world differently than her peers. Most of her peers notice just how different Sweetie is. At first, Sweetie doesn't let it bother her, but eventually Sweetie starts to wonder what it would be like to be someone else.</i></p> <p><i>The only one that truly gets her is her Aunt Ruth, who was also different. Aunt Ruth encouraged Sweetie to be herself. Eventually Sweetie truly understands just how unique she is before making a new friend.</i></p>			

In column two, students identify big ideas. We push our students to come up with at least 5 without it being a stretch.

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<p>Sweetie is a bit unique - even for a naked mole rat. She sees the world differently than her peers. Most of her peers notice just how different Sweetie is. At first, Sweetie doesn't let it bother her, but eventually Sweetie starts to wonder what it would be like to be someone else.</p> <p>The only one that truly gets her is her Aunt Ruth, who was also different. Aunt Ruth encouraged Sweetie to be herself. Eventually Sweetie truly understands just how unique she is before making a new friend.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. self-acceptance 2. being different 3. family 4. friendship 5. finding your people 6. differences 7. identity 		

In column three, students choose two big ideas they feel the piece is mainly about and write a truism for each big idea which could be supported with evidence.

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In the final column, students choose one of their two truisms and provide that evidence from the story.

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We believe in modeling, so we go through these steps after watching a short film together and I gather input from the whole class as we fill it out.

A blank version of the Theme Chart can be found in the online companion.