Central Academy: Entering 8th Grade Summer Reading

We know you have read a lot of novels throughout your lives. At Central Academy, though, we need you to start reading analytically and with purpose. To that end, when you choose your summer reading book we want you to focus on a motif as you read the novel.

*A motif is a recurrent thematic element in a literary work. It is usually one word or a short phrase and helps to lead to a lesson a work is teaching. For example, common motifs through literature are family, childhood, redemption and the like.*

There are many motifs that run through the summer reading choices. As you read your novel, we want you to choose one motif below on which to focus.

Friendship

Family

Courage

Non-conformity

Alienation

Control

Power

Manipulation

War

Abuse

Identity

Social status

Try to choose a motif to which you can relate in your own life. That will help you in making connections. As you read you need to find at least **five** quotations (write them down with the page number) that would support your motif. Try to keep in mind how that motif can help you find a theme.

*A theme is a universal human truth. Universal means it should not be specific to the book but to life and the human condition. A theme cannot be just one word and does not tell people what to do. Finally, the theme must keep the whole work in mind, especially the end.*

In the end, we want you to look at the quotations you have chosen and your ideas about your motif and try to determine a theme. This theme will be the basis of the paper you will write when you come back to school in August.

Here is an example:

The example is going to be from a movie so as not to use the books you are reading. *The Princess Bride* is an amazing movie and could use many of these same motifs. Let’s use the motif of friendship.

If I were reading this book (and there is an awesome book by William Golding from which this movie was created), I would be paying attention to when the idea of friendship was mentioned. I would be marking the quotations and the page numbers. It starts out with the friendship between Buttercup and Westley which eventually turns into love. There is also the friendship between Fezzik and Inigo which lasts through the work. As I’m noticing all of this, though, I also need to be thinking about what lesson the author might be trying to teach about the idea of friendship. After I have finished the book and written my five quotations, I will look through them and try to determine what lessons were taught.

Here are two examples of themes I might use:

1. Friendship can last through any turmoil as long as each person always has faith in the other.
2. If people have true friends, then they can make it through any difficult situation.

Let’s go back up and make sure these themes have followed the directions from the definition.

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These ARE universal. Notice how neither of these themes references any of the specific characters from the work. Instead, they attempt to show what Golding might have been teaching about the idea of friendship by using this story.

These are NOT one word and they do not tell people what to do.

Finally, these do keep the end of the work in mind. If they all died at the end, these would not work because friendship did not get them through any difficult situation.

Weak themes:

Telling people what to do-- People should always support their friends through thick and thin.

We are not attempting to dictate how people behave or suggest that the author intended that, but instead, we are gleaning a lesson from the story that we might choose to live by as we age.

One word—The theme is friendship.

This gives no lesson and is simply a motif.

Not universal—Buttercup learns that if she just had faith in Westley, everything would have been okay.

Though we are using the book to decide upon the lesson, the theme moves away from the book to show what is true for everyone and not just Buttercup.

Now it is your turn—

1. Select your book
2. Select your motif
3. Read the book underlining quotations that relate to that motif
4. When you are done reading, look at the quotations and the ideas you learned and create a theme following the rules above.
5. Finally, write down your theme and your five quotations that would best support that theme.
6. When you come in August, bring these with so we can hit the ground running.

Oh, one last note. You should write your quotations following MLA guidelines. All citations will have quotation marks and no end punctuation (or comma at the end of the citation before the quotation marks) inside the quotation marks unless it is a question mark or exclamation mark. Otherwise the period goes outside of the parenthetical citation only. See examples below.

“Anybody want a peanut?” (65). “Don’t go against a Sicilian when death is on the line!” (123).

“As you wish” (5).