

Substitute Guide: Theme and Summary in a Short Story

Grade: 5 **Subject:** Reading / Language Arts **Time:** ~45 min core + ~15 min extension RLA

5-minute guide (plain language)

Students read a short original story, "The Seed Jar," then find its **theme** (the lesson), notice how the main character's **feelings change**, and write a short **summary** using details. **You do not need a reading background to run this.** Everything — including the whole story — is printed in the student packet, and every question can be answered right from the story. **This packet is read-aloud friendly:** you may read the story or any question out loud to one student or the whole class at any time.

Standards alignment

Framework: 19 TAC §110.7 (Grade 5 English Language Arts and Reading).

- **Theme:** infer the theme or lesson of a literary text and support it with evidence.
- **Summary:** summarize a text so the main events keep their meaning and order.
- **Text detail:** use specific details from the text to support answers.

Provisional — pending educator verification against the current official TAC source.

(Standards are paraphrased here, not quoted. Please confirm codes and wording against your official source.)

Setup Before class (5 min)

- Hand out one **student packet** per student.
- Make sure each student has a **pencil**. No devices or other materials are needed.
- Write the date on the board and remind students to fill in the name line.
- Keep the **answer key** with you — it is a separate file and is **not** in the student packet.

Materials What's needed

- Printed student packet per student.
- Pencil per student.
- This guide and the separate answer key (teacher only).
- No technology, no special materials.

Timing Suggested pacing (~45–60 min)

Segment	Time	What students do
Start — Notice & Predict	5 min	Q1–Q2 warm-up
Build — Read the story	10 min	Read "The Seed Jar," word bank; Q3
Apply — Read closely	15 min	Q4–Q7 (sequence, feelings change, theme, best detail)

Segment	Time	What students do
Explain — Theme & summary	10 min	Q8 theme sentence + 3–4 sentence summary
Close — ACE	5 min	Answer / Cite / Extend
Continue — early finishers	optional ~15 min	Draw and caption a favorite moment

Script Read aloud to start

"Today's activity is a reading and writing task called *Theme and Summary in a Short Story*. You will work by yourself with just a pencil — no computers. First read the short story called *The Seed Jar*. Every answer is in the story, so if you're unsure, go back and read it again. Answer the questions in order; if one is tricky, skip it and come back. You may read the story quietly out loud to yourself. Put your name, class, and date at the top now. You have about 45 minutes. Raise your hand if you want a word or a question read to you — I am happy to read any part aloud."

Reading the story aloud to the whole class first is a great option for Grade 5. It levels the reading load so every student can focus on the thinking.

Support When students ask for help

- **You may read any part aloud** — the story or any question — to a student or the class, at any time.
- If they are stuck, point them to the **paragraph numbers** [1]–[5]; every answer is in the story.
- Remind them a **theme** is a **lesson** written as a full sentence, not one word.
- Remind them a **summary** tells only the **most important** parts, not every little detail.
- Point to the printed **sentence starters** and the **word bank** for Q8 and ACE.
- Do **not** give answers; prompt with "Which paragraph shows that?" or "How does Rosa feel at the end?"

Access Accommodations & language support

- **Read-aloud** of the story or any question is allowed for all students.
- Point students to the **sentence starters** and the **word bank** (kid-friendly meanings provided).
- Extended time is fine; the core can stop after Q8 if time runs short.
- Students may answer in short phrases if writing full sentences is a barrier, as long as the idea is clear.
- The packet is grayscale-safe — it prints and reads clearly in black and white.

Tools Allowed & not allowed

Allowed: pencil, the printed packet, quiet self-read-aloud. **Not needed / not allowed:** phones, computers, outside sources (everything is in the story).

Collect at the end: Collect every packet, whether finished or not, with names on them. Stack them for the teacher. Note on a sticky how far most students got and any questions that caused confusion.

Answer key: The **answer key is a separate file** (answerkey.html) and is for the teacher only. Please do not hand it to students.

Teacher follow-up (for the returning teacher)

Watch for two common mix-ups: *retelling everything* vs. *a focused summary* (students copy the whole story instead of the main parts) and *topic* vs. *theme* (writing "waiting" instead of a full-sentence lesson). A quick next-day mini-lesson turning topic words into theme sentences, and trimming a long retell down to 3–4 key sentences,

would reinforce this well. The feelings-change item (Q5) and the best-detail item (Q7) quickly show who can locate and use a text detail.

G05_RLA_ThemeSummary_01 — Theme and Summary in a Short Story Substitute Guide

Theme and Summary in a Short Story

Grade: 5 **Subject:** Reading / Language Arts **Time:** ~45 min core + ~15 min extension **Work mode:** On your own · pencil only RLA

Start Here

Today you will **read a short story** and answer some questions with a pencil. You do **not** need a computer. Work by yourself and do your best. Every answer is **in the story**, so you can look back as many times as you want. You may read the story **out loud, quietly, to yourself**. If a question is hard, skip it and come back later.

G05_RLA_ThemeSummary_01 — Theme and Summary in a Short Story Student Packet

Start Notice & Predict 5 min

Look only at the title before you read the story.

1The story is called "**The Seed Jar**." From the title, write **one thing you notice** and **one thing you predict** the story is about.

2A **theme** is the **big idea or lesson** of a story — not just what happens. Name one lesson you have learned from a book, show, or real life (for example, "sharing feels good").

Build Read the Story 10 min

Words to know (from the story)

patient

calm and willing to wait.

sprout

a tiny new plant just starting to grow.

gloomy

sad or without hope.

proud

happy about something you did well.

"The Seed Jar" — an original short story

[1] Rosa did not like waiting. When Grandpa handed her a jar of bean seeds and a small pot, she frowned. "How long until it grows?" she asked. "Be *patient*," Grandpa said with a smile. But patient was not a word Rosa liked.

[2] Rosa planted one bean, watered it, and set the pot on the windowsill. The next morning she ran to look. Nothing. Just dark dirt. She felt *gloomy*. "It's broken," she said, and she almost dumped the pot in the trash.

[3] "Growing things takes time you can't see," Grandpa said. "The seed is working under the dirt, even when you think nothing is happening." Rosa was not sure she believed him. She wanted the plant to hurry. But she kept

watering the pot every morning before school and every night before bed. Some days she wanted to quit and do something more fun. Still, she did not throw the pot away.

[4] On the sixth day, a tiny green *sprout* pushed up through the dirt. Rosa gasped and leaned close. It was small and bent, but it was alive. She had almost given up on it, and here it was, reaching for the light. She watered it very gently and told Grandpa the good news.

[5] By the end of the month, the bean plant was tall enough to lean on a stick. Rosa showed it to Grandpa and felt *proud*. "You were right," she said. "The best part was waiting," Grandpa answered. Rosa did not fully agree — but now she knew that good things could grow slowly, and she could wait for them.

3In paragraph [1], how does Rosa feel about waiting? Use a detail from the story.

Apply Read Closely 15 min

Every answer is in the story. Look back before you write.

4Beginning, middle, end. Write what happens in each part of the story. Keep it short.

Beginning

Middle

End

5Feelings change. Rosa's feelings change from the beginning to the end. Fill in the boxes with a detail and the paragraph number.

How Rosa feels at the BEGINNING

Feeling + detail (paragraph #):

How Rosa feels at the END

Feeling + detail (paragraph #):

6Theme. What **lesson** does Rosa learn by the end of the story? Write it as a full sentence.

7Which detail shows the theme best? Fill in the circle for ONE choice.

- "Rosa did not like waiting."
- "She kept watering the pot every day. Some days she wanted to quit."
- "Just dark dirt."
- "Grandpa handed her a jar of bean seeds and a small pot."

7b. In one sentence, tell why that detail shows the lesson.

Explain Write Your Theme & Summary 10 min

Question 8. Write the **theme** in **one sentence**. Then write a **3 to 4 sentence summary** of the story using details. A summary tells the **most important** parts — you do **not** need every little thing.

You may start your sentences with: "The theme is..." · "First,..." · "Then,..." · "At the end,..." · "This shows the theme because..."

Theme (one sentence)

Details (summary: 3–4 sentences)

How they connect

How do your details show the theme?

Close ACE Wrap-Up 5 min

Answer

Say the **lesson** of "The Seed Jar" in your **own words**, in one sentence.

Cite

Name **one paragraph** where you can see that lesson happening.

Extend

Tell about a time **you** had to wait or keep trying for something.

Continue Early Finisher optional • ~15 min

If you finish early (no new materials needed):

Draw your favorite moment from the story on the back of this page. Then write a **one-sentence caption** under your drawing that tells what is happening and why you like it.

Turn in: Hand in this whole packet with your name, class, and date filled in. Make sure questions 1–8 and the ACE box are done. The drawing is optional — turn it in too if you did it.

G05_RLA_ThemeSummary_01 — Theme and Summary in a Short Story Student Packet



TEACHER ANSWER KEY FOLLOWS

Do not copy the pages after this divider for students.

Answer Key: Theme and Summary in a Short Story

Grade: 5 **Subject:** Reading / Language Arts **For teacher use only** RLA

How to use this key

Answers are grouped by section and question number. Many items are open-ended; accept any response that shows correct thinking and uses the story, even if the wording differs. Notes flag where more than one answer works and list common misconceptions. Paragraph numbers below refer to the bracketed markers [1]–[5] in the story. Estimated grading time: ~4–6 min per packet.

Start Notice & Predict grade for effort · ~1 min

1 Notice / predict from the title "The Seed Jar."

Full credit for any reasonable notice + prediction. Examples — Notice: "the title names a jar with seeds." Predict: "someone plants a seed and watches it grow," or "the story is about growing a plant." Any on-topic prediction is fine.

2 Name one lesson from a book/show/real life.

Accept any reasonable lesson stated as an idea about life (e.g., "sharing feels good," "keep trying," "be kind"). If a student writes only a topic word (e.g., "waiting"), give effort credit but note it — Q8 asks for a full theme sentence.

Build Read the Story ~1 min

3 How does Rosa feel about waiting? (paragraph [1])

From **paragraph [1]**: "Rosa did not like waiting"; she frowned; "patient was not a word Rosa liked." **Ideal:** Rosa does not like waiting / is impatient. Accept any answer naming that she dislikes waiting, with a detail from paragraph [1].

Apply Read Closely ~2 min

4 Beginning / middle / end.

Beginning (paragraph [1]–[2]): Grandpa gives Rosa a seed and a pot; she plants a bean but hates waiting and feels gloomy when nothing grows.

Middle (paragraph [3]–[4]): Grandpa says the seed is working under the dirt; Rosa keeps watering even when she wants to quit; on day six a green sprout appears.

End (paragraph [5]): The plant grows tall; Rosa feels proud and learns she can wait for good things to grow. Accept short, correct versions in the student's own words. It is fine if wording is simple.

5 Feelings change (before / after with detail).

Beginning (paragraph [1]–[2]): Rosa feels impatient / gloomy — she frowns, "did not like waiting," almost throws the pot away.

End (paragraph [5]): Rosa feels proud and patient — she shows the plant to Grandpa, says "You were right," and knows she can wait for good things.

Full credit if a beginning feeling + an ending feeling are each supported by a detail and a paragraph number.

6 Theme / lesson (full sentence).

Accept any clear theme sentence about patience or not giving up, such as: "Good things take time and are worth the wait," "Being patient pays off," or "If you keep trying, things can grow." Reject a single topic word (e.g., "patience") as the full answer — note it and connect it to Q8.

7 Best detail that shows the theme.

7a — B. "She kept watering the pot every day. Some days she wanted to quit." This shows Rosa being patient and not giving up, which is the lesson.

Why the others are weaker: **A** shows her impatience at the start (before she changes); **C** is just what she sees; **D** only sets up the story. Only **B** shows the patience the theme is about.

7b: Accept any sentence explaining that choice B shows Rosa kept waiting / did not give up, which is the lesson of the story.

Explain Theme & Summary (Q8) ~2 min

8 One-sentence theme + a 3–4 sentence summary using details.

Acceptable theme statements (any one, or similar, as a full sentence):

- "Good things take time and are worth waiting for."
- "Being patient pays off."
- "If you keep trying and don't give up, things can grow."

Model summary (3–4 sentences): "Grandpa gives Rosa a seed and a pot, but she does not like waiting. When nothing grows at first, she almost gives up, but she keeps watering it. On the sixth day a tiny sprout appears, and the plant grows tall. By the end, Rosa feels proud and learns that good things take time."

Detail locations to support the summary: Grandpa gives the seed and says "be patient" [1]; nothing grows and Rosa feels gloomy [2]; she keeps watering even when she wants to quit [3]; the sprout appears on day six [4]; the plant grows tall and Rosa feels proud [5].

How they connect: the summary should show that Rosa only sees the plant grow because she waits and keeps trying — which is exactly the theme. Full credit for a defensible theme sentence + a focused 3–4 sentence summary that keeps the main events + a link between them.

Theme & summary scoring rubric (3 points)

Score	Theme (one sentence)	Summary (details)	How they connect
3	Clear lesson stated as a full sentence (not a topic word).	3–4 sentences that keep the main events in order; focused, not a full retell.	Clearly explains how the details show the theme.
2	Theme present but partly a topic or a little off.	Summary mostly right but misses a main event or adds too many small details.	Some correct linkage, but not complete.
1	Only a topic word, or a retell instead of a lesson.	Summary is a full copy of the story, or leaves out most of the events.	Little or no connection made.
0	No theme / incorrect.	No summary.	No connection.

Close ACE ~1 min

Answer: accept any accurate one-sentence lesson in the student's own words (see Q8 list).

Cite: the named paragraph must match the lesson (e.g., paragraph [3] "she kept watering... some days she wanted to quit," or paragraph [4] the sprout appears → patience/not giving up).

Extend: any real time the student waited or kept trying (e.g., learning to ride a bike, waiting for a birthday, practicing a sport). More than one answer is fine.

Watch Common misconceptions

- **Retelling everything vs. a focused summary.** A summary keeps only the main events (Rosa hates waiting → keeps watering → the sprout grows → she feels proud). If a student copies the whole story or lists every small detail, it is a retell, not a summary.
- **Topic vs. theme.** A topic is one word ("waiting," "plants"). A theme is a full sentence that says something about that topic ("Good things take time and are worth the wait"). Push students from "waiting" to a full lesson sentence.
- **Detail that does not match the lesson (Q7, Q8).** A detail must actually show the theme. In Q7, choices A, C, and D do not show Rosa being patient — only B does.
- **Feeling change vs. plant growing.** The plant growing is the event; the real change is inside Rosa — from impatient to patient and proud.

Teacher follow-up based on likely errors

If many students copy the whole story on Q8, run a 5-minute mini-lesson on trimming a retell down to 3–4 key sentences (beginning → middle → end). If students write topic words instead of theme sentences, model turning "waiting" into "Good things take time." The feelings-change chart (Q5) is a fast check of who can locate and cite a text detail by paragraph.