

Substitute Guide: Theme and Author's Craft

Course: English II (Grades 9–12) **Subject:** English Language Arts & Reading **Time:** ~50-min period or ~90-min block RLA

5-minute guide (plain language)

Students read an original short story, "The Lantern Keeper," about a woman who has kept a promise to her late grandmother by lighting a lamp every night. They **trace how the theme develops, analyze the main character's change** with text evidence, **identify the author's craft element** (symbolism — the lantern/light) and its effect, choose the line that is the **best evidence for the theme**, and then write a short **analytical response** (Claim = theme, Evidence = text, Reasoning). On a block period, they add a paragraph analyzing how the symbol shapes the theme. **You do not need an English background to run this.** Everything students need — the whole story and the definition of every term — is printed in their packet, and every question can be answered directly from that story. Hand out the packet, read the opening script, let students work independently in pencil, help by reading aloud and pointing to paragraph numbers (never by giving answers), and collect every packet at the end. The answer key is a separate file for the teacher only.

Standards alignment

Framework: 19 TAC §110.37 (English II).

- **Theme:** analyze how themes are developed across a literary text through characters and details.
- **Characterization:** analyze how a character's qualities and changes advance the plot and reveal meaning.
- **Author's craft:** analyze how an author's use of craft, such as symbolism, tone, or structure, contributes to meaning.

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)

- Count and hand out one **student packet** per student.
- Confirm 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.
- Check the plan: is this a **standard ~50-minute period** or a **~90-minute block**? (Pacing for both is below.)

Materials What's needed

- Printed student packet (5–6 pages) per student.
- Pencil per student.
- This guide and the separate answer key (teacher only).
- No technology, no calculator, no special materials.

Timing Standard period vs. block

On a ~50-minute period, do Q1–Q8 and ACE (skip Q9). On a ~90-minute block, add Q9 (analyze the symbol's effect on the theme) and allow deeper work on Q4–Q8.

Segment	~50-min period	~90-min block	What students do
Start — Predict & warm up	5 min	7 min	Q1–Q2 (predict from title + term match)
Build — Read the story	12 min	15 min	Read the story, word bank; Q3
Apply — Analyze the story	18 min	28 min	Q4–Q7 (trace theme, characterization, symbol + effect, best-evidence choice)
Explain — Analytical response	10 min	18 min	Q8 C-E-R response on theme
Explain (block) — Craft analysis	—	10 min	Q9 analyze how the symbol shapes the theme
Close — ACE	5 min	7 min	Articulate / Connect / Extend
Continue — early finishers	optional	optional	Rewrite a moment from the girl's point of view

Script Read aloud to start

"Today's assignment is a reading and analysis activity called *Theme and Author's Craft*. You will work by yourself with just a pencil — no computers. First read the short story *The Lantern Keeper*, about a woman who has kept a promise to her late grandmother by lighting a lamp every night. Your job is to figure out the story's **theme** — its message about life — to show how the main character **changes**, to explain how the author uses the **lantern as a symbol**, and then to prove the theme with evidence from the story. Every question can be answered from the story, so if you're unsure, go back and reread. Answer the questions in order; if one is tricky, skip it and come back. Write in complete sentences where it asks you to explain, and always name the paragraph you're using. You may quietly read the story aloud to yourself. Put your name, class period, and date at the top now. [On a block: You'll also add a paragraph analyzing the symbol in Question 9.] Raise your hand if you need a word read to you or explained."

Support When students ask for help

- **You may read any part aloud** — the story or any question — to a student or the class.
- If they are stuck, point them to the **paragraph numbers** [1]–[9]; every answer is in the story.
- Remind them: a **theme** is the message about life (not just the topic); **characterization** = how the character is shown and how she changes; **symbolism** = an object standing for a bigger idea (all defined in the packet word bank).
- For "trace the theme" (Q4), prompt: "What does the light mean to Nadia at the start? What does she realize after the girl comes? What has changed?"
- For Q8, remind them to **analyze, not summarize** — state the theme, then prove it with details, don't just retell the plot. Encourage the printed **sentence stems**.
- Do **not** give answers; prompt with "Which paragraph shows that?" or "What does the light stand for there?"
- It is fine if a student cannot finish the optional early-finisher task, or Q9 on a short period.

Access Accommodations & language support

- **Read-aloud** of the story or any question is allowed for all students.
- Point students to the **sentence stems** and the **word bank** (definitions provided for all five terms).

- Extended time is fine; the core can stop after Q8 if time runs short.
- Students may answer in phrases if writing full sentences is a barrier, as long as the idea is clear and cites a paragraph.
- 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, whether it was a period or a block, 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 patterns: students *naming a topic instead of a theme* on Q4 and Q8 (writing "grief" or "lighthouses" rather than a full statement about life) and *summary instead of analysis* on Q8 (retelling the plot rather than proving the theme with details). A quick next-day mini-lesson contrasting a topic ("promises") with a theme sentence ("keeping a promise can trap us until we understand what it was really for"), plus sorting a few lines by what the lantern symbolizes, would reinforce this well. Q4 and Q5 show who can trace theme and track a dynamic character; Q6 shows who can read a symbol and its effect; the Q8 response — and the Q9 craft paragraph on block days — show who can state a theme and defend it with evidence and reasoning.

HS_ENG2_ThemeCraft_01 — Theme and Author's Craft in Fiction Substitute Guide

Theme and Author's Craft in Fiction

Course: English II (Grades 9–12) **Subject:** English Language Arts & Reading **Time:** ~50-min period, or a ~90-min block (adds deeper craft analysis + revision) **Work mode:** Independent · pencil only RLA

Start Here

This is a **reading and analysis task**. You will read an original short story, then analyze how the writer builds meaning — the **theme** (the story's message about life), the **characterization** (how the main character is shown and how she changes), and one **craft element** the author uses on purpose (here, **symbolism**). You will work with a pencil only; you do **not** need a computer or any device. Every question about the story can be answered **from the story itself** — the evidence is on the page. Write in complete sentences where you are asked to explain, and always name the **paragraph** you are drawing from. If a question is hard, skip it, keep going, and come back. Reading the story quietly aloud to yourself is allowed and encouraged.

Start Predict & Warm Up 5 min

Look only at the title and the first sentence of the story before you read the rest.

1The story is titled "**The Lantern Keeper**." From the title alone, **predict** what object will matter most in the story and what job or role the main character might have. Write one or two sentences.

2**Term warm-up.** Match each craft term to its meaning. Write the letter (A, B, or C) on each blank.

A. theme — the deeper message or lesson about life that a story conveys · **B. symbolism** — when an object stands for a bigger idea · **C. characterization** — the ways an author shows what a character is like

___ A lit lamp in a window comes to stand for hope and purpose.

___ We learn a character is loyal because she keeps a promise through storms and fevers.

___ The idea that we must let go of the past to keep serving the living.

Build Read the Story 12 min

Words to know (for theme and author's craft)

theme

the deeper message or insight about life that a story reveals — not the topic, but what the story says *about* the topic.

characterization

the methods an author uses to show what a character is like — through words, actions, thoughts, and change.

symbolism

when a concrete object, place, or action stands for a larger idea beyond itself.

tone

the author's attitude toward the subject, created by word choice and detail.

motif

an image, idea, or detail that repeats through a story and helps build its theme.

"The Lantern Keeper" — an original short story

[1] For eleven years, Nadia had lit the lamp in the tower window every night at dusk, exactly as her grandmother had taught her. The lighthouse had gone dark decades ago — the harbor built a taller beacon of steel and electricity down the coast — but Nadia's small lamp still burned in the old stone tower each evening. Her neighbors called it a habit. Nadia called it a promise.

[2] The lamp was her grandmother's last request. On the night before she died, the old woman had pressed the brass lantern into Nadia's hands and whispered, "Someone out there is always looking for a light. Don't let it go out." So Nadia hadn't. Through storms, through fevers, through the long winter her mother left, the small flame had never once failed to appear in the window.

[3] But this autumn, the fishing boats stopped coming. The harbor emptied. The village grew quiet, and Nadia began to wonder whether anyone was looking for her light at all. Each dusk she climbed the ninety-seven steps feeling heavier, the brass lantern colder in her palm, the flame smaller against the enormous dark.

[4] One grey evening, a girl appeared at the base of the tower — soaked, shivering, no older than ten. "I saw the light from the cliff road," she said. "I was lost. I followed it down." Nadia stared at her, then at the lantern, then at the black water beyond the glass.

[5] "I almost didn't light it tonight," Nadia admitted.

[6] The girl frowned, as if this were the strangest thing she had ever heard. "But it's the only light out here," she said simply, and warmed her hands against the glass.

[7] That night, after the girl had gone home safe, Nadia sat a long time with the lantern. She had believed the light was a duty owed to the dead — a debt she paid alone, in the cold, to a grandmother who could no longer see it. But the girl on the cliff road had not needed Nadia's grief. She had needed only the flame.

[8] In the morning, Nadia carried the brass lantern down the ninety-seven steps and set it in the window of her own small kitchen, where the cliff road passed close and any traveler could see it. She lit a second lamp for the tower. The promise, she understood now, had never been about the stone tower or the darkened harbor. It had been about keeping something alight for whoever came next — and letting the rest of them go.

[9] The lighthouse still stood dark and useless on its rock. But every evening two lights burned above the water now, and Nadia climbed the ninety-seven steps with the brass lantern feeling, for the first time in eleven years, strangely light.

3In paragraph [2], what exactly did Nadia's grandmother ask her to do, and in her own words, what did she say? Answer using details from the story.

Apply Analyze the Story 20 min

Every answer in this section is in the story. Point to the paragraph in your head before you write.

4Trace how the theme develops. A theme is built step by step. In each box, write what Nadia **believes about the light** at that point in the story. Then state the **theme** in one sentence.

Beginning — what the light means to Nadia (paragraphs [1]–[3])

Turning point — what the girl helps Nadia see (paragraphs [4]–[7])

End — the theme in one sentence (what the story says about life)

5Analyze characterization with evidence. Nadia is a **dynamic character** — she changes. Copy one detail from **early** in the story that shows how she first sees her task, and one detail from **late** in the story that shows how she

has changed. Name the paragraph for each, then explain the change.

Early detail (with paragraph #)

Late detail (with paragraph #)

How has Nadia changed? Explain.

6Identify the craft element and its effect. The author uses **symbolism**: the **lantern / light** stands for more than a flame. In your own words, what does the light come to **symbolize** by the end of the story, and how does that symbol help the reader understand the theme?

What the light symbolizes

Effect — how the symbol builds the theme

7Which line is the best evidence for the theme? Suppose the theme is: *we must let go of the past to keep serving the living*. Which line from the story **best** supports that theme? Fill in the circle for ONE choice.

- "The lighthouse had gone dark decades ago."
- "It had been about keeping something alight for whoever came next — and letting the rest of them go."
- "Each dusk she climbed the ninety-seven steps feeling heavier."
- "I saw the light from the cliff road."

7b. In one sentence, explain why the line you chose supports the theme better than the others.

Explain Analytical Response on Theme 10–15 min

Question 8. Write an **analytical response** that states the story's **theme** and proves it from the text. Do not just retell the plot — **analyze** it. Use the C-E-R frame below: your **Claim** is the theme, your **Evidence** is at least **two** details or quotations from the story (name the paragraph for each), and your **Reasoning** explains how that evidence develops the theme.

Sentence stems you may use: "The theme of 'The Lantern Keeper' is that..." · "One detail that develops this theme is ____ in paragraph ____, which shows..." · "The author also shows this when ____ (paragraph ____); this matters because..." · "Together, these details reveal that..."

Claim (the theme — what the story says about life)

Evidence (two details/quotations from the story, with paragraph #)

Reasoning (how each detail develops the theme)

Block period only (~90-min class): Analyze the craft element's effect.

Question 9. Add a paragraph to your response that analyzes how the author's **symbolism** — the lantern and light — **shapes** the theme. Explain what the light means at the start, what it means at the end, and how that shift in the symbol makes the theme land more powerfully than if the author had simply stated the message outright. Cite at least one paragraph.

Close ACE Wrap-Up 5 min

Articulate

Say the story's **theme** in your **own words**, in one sentence, as if telling a friend the point of the story.

Connect

Name the **one moment** in the story where Nadia **changes** the most, and point to the paragraph.

Extend

The last line calls Nadia "strangely light." In a sentence, explain the **double meaning** of the word *light* there and why the author ends on it.

Continue Early Finisher optional

If you finish early (no new materials needed):

Write the girl's version. On the back of this page, retell one moment of the story — the night she followed the light down the cliff road — from the **girl's point of view**. Keep the same theme, but use at least one **symbol** of your own (an object that stands for a bigger idea) and label which detail is your symbol.

Turn in: Hand in this whole packet with your name, class period, and date filled in. Make sure questions 1–8 and the ACE box are answered. Question 9 (craft analysis) is for block periods; the early-finisher rewrite is optional — turn either in if you did it.

HS_ENG2_ThemeCraft_01 — Theme and Author's Craft in Fiction Student Packet



TEACHER ANSWER KEY FOLLOWS

Do not copy the pages after this divider for students.

Answer Key: Theme and Author's Craft

Course: English II (Grades 9–12) **Subject:** English Language Arts & Reading **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 reasoning and cites the story, even if the wording differs. Notes flag where more than one answer is defensible and list common misconceptions to watch for. Paragraph numbers below refer to the bracketed markers [1]–[9] in the story. Estimated grading time: ~6–8 min per packet.

Start Predict & Warm Up grade for effort · ~2 min

1 Predict the object and the character's role from the title.

Accept any reasonable prediction: the **lantern/lamp/light** will matter most, and the main character keeps, tends, or guards a light (a "keeper," like a lighthouse keeper). Grade for a sensible prediction, not for matching the story exactly.

2 Term warm-up (match the craft term).

"A lit lamp in a window comes to stand for hope and purpose." → **B (symbolism)** — an object standing for a bigger idea.

"We learn a character is loyal because she keeps a promise through storms and fevers." → **C (characterization)** — showing what a character is like.

"The idea that we must let go of the past to keep serving the living." → **A (theme)** — a message about life.

All three correct = full credit; grade for reasonable effort on this warm-up.

Build Read the Story ~1 min

3 The grandmother's request in paragraph [2].

From **paragraph [2]**: the grandmother pressed the **brass lantern** into Nadia's hands and asked her to **keep the light burning** — she said, "**Someone out there is always looking for a light. Don't let it go out.**" Accept any answer that names the promise to keep the light lit and references that instruction.

Apply Analyze the Story ~3 min

4 Trace how the theme develops.

Beginning ([1]–[3]): Nadia sees the light as a **duty or promise owed to her dead grandmother** — a habit she keeps alone, feeling heavier and emptier as the harbor empties and she doubts anyone is watching.

Turning point ([4]–[7]): the lost girl followed the light down the cliff road; Nadia realizes the girl "had not needed Nadia's grief... only the flame" — the light is for **the living, not a debt to the dead**.

Theme (one sentence): accept any accurate statement of the message, e.g., "We must let go of the past — even our grief — to keep the promise that truly matters: serving whoever comes next." Also acceptable: "A promise is

kept not by clinging to the dead but by giving light to the living." **Reject a bare topic** ("grief," "promises," "lighthouses") — the theme must say something *about* life.

5 Characterization with evidence (Nadia is dynamic).

Early detail: e.g., paragraph [3] — "Each dusk she climbed the ninety-seven steps feeling heavier... the flame smaller against the enormous dark," or [7] "a duty owed to the dead — a debt she paid alone." Shows her task feels like a lonely burden.

Late detail: paragraph [8] she moves the lantern to her kitchen window "where... any traveler could see it," or [9] she climbs "feeling, for the first time in eleven years, strangely light."

Change: full credit if the student pairs a valid early detail and late detail (each with a paragraph number) and explains that Nadia shifts from a **grieving, burdened keeper of a private debt** to someone who keeps the light **for others / for the living**, and feels lighter for it.

6 Identify the craft element (symbolism) and its effect.

What the light symbolizes: the lantern/light stands for **purpose, hope, and care for others** — and, by the end, a promise kept for the living rather than a debt paid to the dead. Early on it also carries the weight of **grief and duty**.

Effect: because the light is a symbol, Nadia's inner change is made **visible and physical** — moving the lamp to a window travelers can see shows her new understanding without the author stating it directly. The symbol lets the theme be *shown*, making it more powerful and memorable.

Full credit for naming what the light stands for **and** explaining that the symbol carries/develops the theme (shows change, avoids a flat "moral").

7 Best evidence for the theme.

7a — B. "It had been about keeping something alight for whoever came next — and letting the rest of them go." This directly states both halves of the theme: **serving the living** and **letting go of the past**.

Why the others are weaker: **A** and **D** are setting/plot details; **C** shows Nadia's burden but not the resolution/theme.

7b: accept any sentence explaining that B captures the story's message about letting go and serving the living, while the others are background or a single feeling.

Explain Analytical Response on Theme (Q8) ~2–3 min

8 C-E-R response — state the theme, prove it with two details, reason.

This is **analysis, not summary**. A strong response states a theme (Claim), supports it with **two** details or quotations (Evidence, with paragraph numbers), and explains how each develops the theme (Reasoning). **Model response:**

"The theme of 'The Lantern Keeper' is that we must let go of the past to keep the promises that truly matter to the living. At first, Nadia treats the light as a debt to her dead grandmother — 'a duty owed to the dead... a debt she paid alone' (paragraph [7]) — and climbing to light it leaves her feeling 'heavier' ([3]). But when a lost girl says, 'it's the only light out here' ([6]), Nadia sees that 'the girl... had not needed Nadia's grief... only the flame' ([7]). By moving the lantern to a window 'any traveler could see' ([8]), she keeps the promise for the living instead of the dead. Together these details show that the promise was never about grief — it was about giving light to whoever comes next, which is why Nadia finally feels 'strangely light' ([9])."

Full credit for: (a) a clear **theme statement** (the Claim), (b) **two** specific details or quotations with paragraph numbers (Evidence), and (c) **reasoning that connects each to the theme** — not just naming them. A response that only retells the plot has *summarized, not analyzed*; score it low on reasoning.

9 (**Block period only**) Analyze how the symbol shapes the theme.

The added paragraph should track the **lantern/light as a symbol** across the story and tie it to the theme. **Model paragraph:**

"The lantern is the author's central symbol, and its meaning shifts to carry the theme. At the start the light stands for a **debt to the dead**: Nadia keeps it 'in the cold, to a grandmother who could no longer see it' ([7]), so it feels like a burden ([3]). After the girl follows it down the cliff road, the same flame comes to stand for **care for the living** — Nadia moves it where 'any traveler could see it' ([8]). Because the author shows this shift through the object rather than stating the lesson outright, the theme lands more powerfully: we *watch* Nadia change when she moves the light, and the final pun on 'strangely light' ([9]) fuses the symbol with her relief."

Full credit for a paragraph that (a) explains what the symbol means early vs. late and (b) argues that the shifting symbol develops/strengthens the theme, citing at least one paragraph.

Response scoring rubric (3 points, Q8)

Score	Claim (theme)	Evidence (two details)	Reasoning (how it develops the theme)
3	Clear theme statement about life (not just a topic).	Two specific details or quotations, each tied to the correct paragraph.	Explains <i>how</i> each detail develops the theme — true analysis.
2	Theme present but vague, or stated as a near-topic.	One solid detail, or two with a minor error or vague location.	Some reasoning, but partly slips into retelling.
1	Only a topic ("grief," "promises"); no real theme.	Evidence vague, off-topic, or not from the story.	Plot summary only; no link to theme.
0	No claim / off-task.	No evidence.	No reasoning.

Close ACE ~1 min

ACE Articulate / Connect / Extend.

Articulate: accept any accurate one-sentence restatement of the theme (letting go of the past to keep the light for the living).

Connect: the clearest change moment is **paragraph [7]** (Nadia realizes the girl needed the flame, not her grief) or **[8]** (she moves the lantern for travelers). Accept either with a valid reason.

Extend: "light" is a **pun / double meaning** — Nadia feels physically **light** (not heavy, since [3] she felt "heavier") and is also carrying the **light/lantern**. The author ends on it to show her burden of grief has lifted. Accept any answer that names both meanings and links to her relief.

Watch Common misconceptions

- **Topic vs. theme.** Students often write a topic ("grief," "promises," "lighthouses") instead of a theme. A theme is a full statement *about life* ("keeping a promise means understanding who it was really for"). Push for a sentence, not a word.
- **Summary vs. analysis.** On Q8 students may retell the plot instead of proving the theme. Analysis states the theme and explains how details build it; summary just says what happens. Require a claim plus reasoning.
- **Symbol = the literal object.** On Q6 some students say the light "symbolizes a lamp." A symbol stands for a *bigger idea* (purpose, hope, caring for the living). Anchor them: what does the object *mean* beyond itself?
- **Static vs. dynamic character.** On Q5 students may describe Nadia without showing change. A dynamic character is different by the end; require an early detail *and* a late one that contrast.
- **Missing the shift in the symbol.** Strong answers note the light *changes meaning* (debt to the dead → light for the living). Crediting only one meaning misses how the craft develops the theme.

Teacher follow-up based on likely errors

If many students write a topic instead of a theme, run a 5-minute mini-lesson contrasting a topic word ("promises") with a theme sentence ("a promise can trap us until we understand what it was really for"). If Q6 symbol answers stay literal, sort a few lines aloud by what the lantern *means* at that point in the story. The Q4, Q5, and Q6 items quickly reveal who can trace theme, track a dynamic character, and read a symbol; the Q8 response — and, on block days, the Q9 craft paragraph — show who can state a theme and defend it with evidence and reasoning.

HS_ENG2_ThemeCraft_01 — Theme and Author's Craft in Fiction Teacher Answer Key