

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