

Set Purposes for Reading

BQ BIG Question

As you read this story, pay attention to the extraordinary individuals and animals the old peddler counts on.

Literary Element Theme

The **theme** of a literary work is its overall message about life or about human nature. Folktales across cultures contain similar themes. For example, "friendship is important" is a theme that is common to many folktales.

Discovering the theme of a story is important because it helps you to see a work's deeper meaning. A story's theme can teach you lessons about life. As you read, ask yourself: What is the author's main message? What is the author trying to tell me about life?

Reading Strategy Interpret Plot Events

Plot is the sequence of events in a story. When you **interpret plot events**, you use your understanding of the world to decide what events in the plot mean. Do events in the plot resemble events in everyday life? Do they suggest a deeper meaning about life?

When you interpret something, you decide for yourself what it means to you. To interpret plot events, think about

- what you already know about human nature and about the world
- what the events in the story might mean

As you read, list plot events and their meaning in a graphic organizer like the one shown.

Plot Event	What This Event Might Mean

Learning Objectives

For pages 134–143

In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

Literary Study: Analyzing theme.

Reading: Analyzing plot.

TRY IT

Interpret Imagine that you are listening to your best friend talk about a soccer game. Your friend describes how the star player scored the winning goal. Think about how your friend's facial expression, tone of voice, and body language help you interpret whether your friend is pleased or disappointed with the results of the match.

We Are All One

Laurence Yep

Long ago there was a rich man with a disease in his eyes. For many years, the pain was so great that he could not sleep at night. He saw every doctor he could, but none of them could help him.

"What good is all my money?" he groaned. Finally, he became so desperate that he sent criers¹ through the city offering a reward to anyone who could cure him.

Now in that city lived an old candy peddler. He would walk around with his baskets of candy, but he was so kind-hearted that he gave away as much as he sold, so he was always poor.

When the old peddler heard the announcement, he remembered something his mother had said. She had once told him about a magical herb that was good for the eyes. So he packed up his baskets and went back to the single tiny room in which his family lived.

When he told his plan to his wife, she scolded him, "If you go off on this crazy hunt, how are we supposed to eat?"

Usually the peddler gave in to his wife, but this time he was stubborn. "There are two baskets of candy," he said. "I'll be back before they're gone."

¹ Since few people could read in ancient times, the rich man had to employ *criers*, people who shouted out announcements or news, to make his offer known.

Interpret Plot Events Is a mother's advice usually right or wrong? How does that help you know that the peddler will look for the magical herb?

The next morning, as soon as the soldiers opened the gates, he was the first one to leave the city. He did not stop until he was deep inside the woods. As a boy, he had often wandered there. He had liked to pretend that the shadowy forest was a green sea and he was a fish slipping through the cool waters.

As he examined the ground, he noticed ants scurrying² about. On their backs were larvae³ like white grains of rice. A rock had fallen into a stream, so the water now spilled into the ant's nest.

"We're all one," the kind-hearted peddler said. So he waded into the shallow stream and put the rock on the bank. Then with a sharp stick, he dug a shallow ditch that sent the rest of the water back into the stream.

Without another thought about his good deed, he began to search through the forest. He looked everywhere; but as the day went on, he grew sleepy. "Ho-hum. I got up too early. I'll take just a short nap," he decided, and lay down in the shade of an old tree, where he fell right asleep.

In his dreams, the old peddler found himself standing in the middle of a great city. Tall buildings rose high overhead. He couldn't see the sky even when he tilted back his head. An escort of soldiers marched up to him with a loud clatter of their black lacquer armor. "Our queen wishes to see you," the captain said.

The frightened peddler could only obey and let the fierce soldiers lead him into a shining palace. There, a woman with a high crown sat upon a tall throne. Trembling, the old peddler fell to his knees and touched his forehead against the floor.

But the queen ordered him to stand. "Like the great Emperor Yü of long ago, you tamed the great flood. We are all one now. You have only to ask, and I or any of my people will come to your aid."

2 If an ant is *scurrying*, it is moving briskly or excitedly.

3 *Larvae* (lär've) is the plural of larva, which is the early, wormlike form of an insect. A caterpillar is the larva of a butterfly or moth.

Vocabulary

lacquer (lak'ər) *n.* a liquid that is poured on wood or metal and dries to form a shiny coat

Theme How is the expression "we are all one" a clue to the theme?



Theme Explain how the queen's speech reveals the theme of the folktale.

Eight Views at the Confluence of the Hsiao and Hsiang Rivers (detail).
Zosan.

View the Art In what way do details of this picture help you better understand the story?

The old peddler cleared his throat. "I am looking for a certain herb. It will cure any disease of the eyes."

The queen shook her head regretfully.⁴ "I have never heard of that herb. But you will surely find it if you keep looking for it."

And then the old peddler woke. Sitting up, he saw that in his wanderings he had come back to the ants' nest. It was there he had taken his nap. His dream city had been the ants' nest itself.

"This is a good omen," he said to himself, and he began searching even harder. He was so determined to find the herb that he did not notice how time had passed. He was surprised when he saw how the light was fading. He looked all around then. There was no sight of his city—only strange hills. He realized then that he had searched so far he had gotten lost.

Night was coming fast and with it the cold. He rubbed his arms and hunted for shelter. In the twilight, he thought he could see the green tiles of a roof.

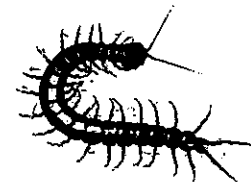
He stumbled through the growing darkness until he reached a ruined temple. Weeds grew through cracks in the stones and most of the roof itself had fallen in. Still, the ruins would provide some protection.

As he started inside, he saw a centipede with bright orange skin and red tufts of fur along its back. Yellow dots covered its sides like a dozen tiny eyes. It was also rushing



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Visual Vocabulary

A **centipede** is a long, flat insect with many pairs of legs.



⁴ **Regretfully** means in a way that shows sorrow or disappointment.

Vocabulary

omen (ō'mən) *n.* a sign or an event thought to foretell good or bad fortune

into the temple as fast as it could, but there was a bird swooping down toward it.

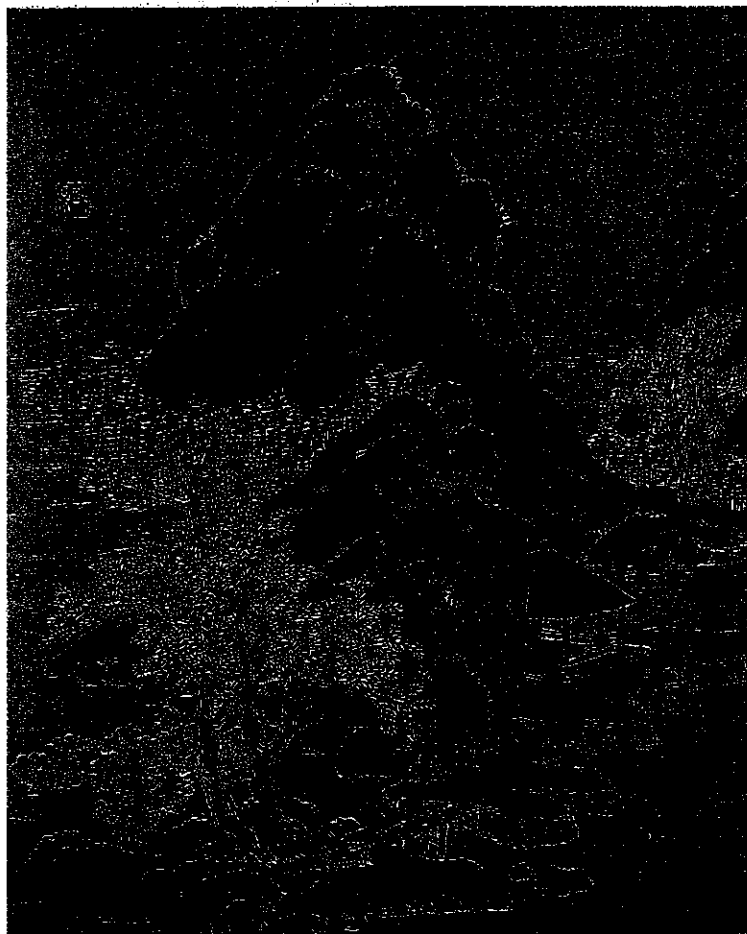
The old peddler waved his arms and shouted, scaring the bird away. Then he put down his palm in front of the insect. "We are all one, you and I." The many feet tickled his skin as the centipede climbed onto his hand.

Inside the temple, he gathered dried leaves and found old sticks of wood and soon he had a fire going. The peddler even picked some fresh leaves for the centipede from a bush near the temple doorway. "I may have to go hungry, but you don't have to, friend."

Stretching out beside the fire, the old peddler pillowed his head on his arms. He was so tired that he soon fell asleep, but even in his sleep he dreamed he was still searching in the woods. Suddenly he thought he heard

Interpret Plot Events

The peddler protects the centipede. How might this act help the peddler later in the story?



Landscape, early 18th century. Yao Song. Private collection.



River Scene, 18th century. China. Free Library, Philadelphia, PA.

footsteps near his head. He woke instantly and looked about, but he only saw the brightly colored centipede.

"Was it you, friend?" The old peddler chuckled and, lying down, he closed his eyes again. "I must be getting nervous.

"We are one, you and I," a voice said faintly—as if from a long distance. "If you go south, you will find a pine tree with two trunks. By its roots, you will find a magic bead.

Theme How does the centipede prove that "we are all one"?

A cousin of mine spat on it years ago. Dissolve that bead in wine and tell the rich man to drink it if he wants to heal his eyes."

The old peddler trembled when he heard the voice, because he realized that the centipede was magical. He wanted to run from the temple, but he couldn't even get up. It was as if he were glued to the floor.

But then the old peddler reasoned with himself: If the centipede had wanted to hurt me, it could have long ago. Instead, it seems to want to help me.

So the old peddler stayed where he was, but he did not dare open his eyes. When the first sunlight fell through the roof, he raised one eyelid cautiously. There was no sign of the centipede. He sat up and looked around, but the magical centipede was gone.

He followed the centipede's instructions when he left the temple. Traveling south, he kept a sharp eye out for the pine tree with two trunks. He walked until late in the afternoon, but all he saw were normal pine trees.

Wearily he sat down and sighed. Even if he found the pine tree, he couldn't be sure that he would find the bead. Someone else might even have discovered it a long time ago.

But something made him look a little longer. Just when he was thinking about turning back, he saw the odd tree. Somehow his tired legs managed to carry him over to the tree, and he got down on his knees. But the ground was covered with pine needles and his old eyes were too weak. The old peddler could have wept with frustration,⁵ and then he remembered the ants.

He began to call, "Ants, ants, we are all one."

Almost immediately, thousands of ants came boiling out of nowhere. Delighted, the old man held up his fingers. "I'm looking for a bead. It might be very tiny."

Then, careful not to crush any of his little helpers, the old man sat down to wait. In no time, the ants reappeared with a tiny bead. With trembling fingers, the old man took the bead from them and examined it. It was colored orange and looked as if it had yellow eyes on the sides.

⁵ **Frustration** means disappointment or irritation at being kept from doing or achieving something.



BQ BIG Question

Whom or what is the peddler able to count on in this story?

There was nothing very special about the bead, but the old peddler treated it like a fine jewel. Putting the bead into his pouch, the old peddler bowed his head. "I thank you and I thank your queen," the old man said. After the ants disappeared among the pine needles, he made his way out of the woods.

The next day, he reached the house of the rich man. However, he was so poor and ragged that the gatekeeper only laughed at him. "How could an old beggar like you help my master?"

The old peddler tried to argue. "Beggar or rich man, we are all one."

But it so happened that the rich man was passing by the gates. He went over to the old peddler. "I said anyone could see me. But it'll mean a stick across your back if you're wasting my time."

The old peddler took out the pouch. "Dissolve this bead in some wine and drink it down." Then, turning the pouch upside down, he shook the tiny bead onto his palm and handed it to the rich man.

The rich man immediately called for a cup of wine. Dropping the bead into the wine, he waited a moment and then drank it down. Instantly the pain vanished. Shortly after that, his eyes healed.

The rich man was so happy and grateful that he doubled the reward. And the kindly old peddler and his family lived comfortably for the rest of their lives.

Theme: The gatekeeper and the peddler are different. How might this difference relate to the story's theme?

Theme: What advice does this folktale offer?



After You Read

Respond and Think Critically

1. What is the peddler's first act of kindness toward another creature? Describe it. [Recall]
2. When the rich man sees the peddler at the gate, what does he say? What do the rich man's first words tell you about his personality? Explain. [Infer]
3. How does the story end? How do you think the peddler will act, now that his life has changed? Explain. [Analyze]
4. **Literary Element** Theme How does the title, "We Are All One," relate to the story's theme? Explain. [Analyze]
5. **Reading Strategy** Interpret Plot Events Review your chart of plot events. Which events do you think are most important to the story's theme? Explain. [Evaluate]
6. **BQ** BIG Question Who or what is the extraordinary individual in this story? Use details from the story to support your answer. [Interpret]

Vocabulary Practice

Respond to these questions.

1. Which item might be covered by **lacquer**—a shield or a dress?
2. What might be seen as a good **omen**—a star shooting across the sky or a dead flower in the grass?

Writing

Write a Blurb A blurb is a short piece of writing that praises and promotes something, such as a book or a movie. You often see a blurb on the cover of a book. What does "We Are All One" say about life? Write a blurb in which you answer this question. The story's title can help you answer the question.

TIP

Analyzing

Here are some tips to help you analyze how the story's title relates to its theme. Think about what the author shows you through the events, characters, and dialogue in the story.

- Think about when the title phrase is stated in the story.
- What do the characters do after saying the phrase?
- How do the characters' actions fit the theme and the phrase?

FOLDABLES Study Organizer Keep track of your ideas about the **BIG Question** in your unit Foldable.

LOG
ON

Literature Online

Selection Resources

For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u1.