

Fantasy Book Clubs: The Magic of Themes and Symbols

Grade 5: Fiction, Unit 4

Postassessment Sample Responses

Following are sample responses for each question, at a range of levels. These samples will help students notice if they have done similar work in their responses, and thus will be a helpful part of their self-assessment. These can also serve as mentor texts to help your students to identify specific ways they can lift their work to the next level.

Question	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
<p>1. The author starts the story with these sentences:</p> <p><i>Surely, I thought, stretching upon my cushion, my life is perfect. I loved to lie purring in Queen Arabella’s arms as she plotted evil enchantments against the prince in the next realm. Someday, we would destroy him. Being the right-hand cat of an evil queen had been my dream since I was a kitten. I’d been with Queen Arabella for nearly six years, and I intended to spend the rest of my life helping her plot.</i></p> <p>How is this part of the story important to the whole?</p> <p><i>Analyzing Parts of a Story in Relation to the Whole</i></p>	<p>I think that this part of the story is important because it introduces the main characters—Mittens, the cat, and Queen Arabella. It’s also important because Mittens says he’ll be with the queen for his whole life but then he ends up leaving her a little later in the story!</p> <p><i>Responses at this level discuss how a particular part affects or is affected by other parts of the story. Students name the story element that is featured in this part and also include specific details from other parts of the story, perhaps to explain a decision or change.</i></p>	<p>I think that this part of the story is important because it introduces the main characters—Mittens and Queen Arabella. It’s also important because it shows that Mittens loves Queen Arabella and is loyal. Mittens says that he plans to “spend the rest of my life helping her plot.” But then he ends up leaving her a little later in the story!</p> <p><i>Responses at this level use literary language to explain how a particular part of the story is important to the whole story. In addition to discussing the story element(s) featured in this part, students may also discuss how this part supports a larger idea or theme in the text. Fifth-grade responses may also consider the author’s word choice or craft techniques, and often quote the text.</i></p>	<p>I think that this part of the story, which is the beginning, is important because it introduces Mittens as the main character and the narrator. It shows that Mittens is devoted and loyal to Queen Arabella, especially when he says that he plans to “spend the rest of my life helping her plot.” His loyalty to the queen is what gets him past obstacles later in the story. We see it here.</p> <p>The beginning also introduces that Mittens and the Queen are ruthless. The author shows that they plot “evil enchantments,” and they want to “destroy” the prince who rules the kingdom next door. It’s unusual that a main character is evil.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level use literary language to explain how a particular part of the story is important to the whole story. Students are also able to explain how a small part of the text supports larger ideas or themes, develops a character, or plays another important role in the story.</i></p>

Question	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
<p>2. The author uses some of the techniques of fantasy writers in this story. Discuss what you notice about the author's craft technique(s).</p> <p><i>Analyzing Author's Craft</i></p>	<p>The author uses the technique of sending Mittens on a quest. He faces different dangers along the way and he has to get past them. Most fantasy heroes have to do that. The author does that to keep the story interesting.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level name one or more craft techniques used by the author, as well as the goals the author is trying to achieve. Students may attempt to explain the significance of the craft choice—perhaps in an effort to explain something more about a character or to say what the story is really about.</i></p>	<p>The author creates a quest structure in this story. Mittens goes on a quest journey to return to Queen Arabella. He faces some obstacles along the way. Most fantasy stories have a hero that faces obstacles. For example, Mittens faces the Bumblesnook. The author puts a lot of obstacles in Mittens way and he defeats them all.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level use literary language to name a couple craft techniques the author uses across the story and his or her reasons for using them. Students may consider how the text would have been different if the author had made different craft choices. That is, there's an understanding that the choices were deliberate ones with important effects.</i></p>	<p>The author uses two techniques that many fantasy writers use in this story. One is a quest structure. Mittens ends up on a quest to return to Queen Arabella. He is on a hero's journey and he overcomes many obstacles, such as the Bumblesnook, on his journey.</p> <p>The second technique is that Mittens is not like a normal hero and has many flaws. He is an anti-hero. He is fat, he is selfish, he likes to plot "evil enchantments." But like Professor Snape, and most anti-heroes, Mittens is also good, and he ends up showing his goodness.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level continue to use literary language to name various craft techniques the author uses and to explain the author's specific goals in using these. Students at this level can discuss the author's treatment of character, setting, and problem, as well as the impact of the author's craft choices and language on the story's tone or mood.</i></p>
<p>3. What themes are especially important in this story? Provide evidence to support your ideas.</p> <p><i>Determining Themes/Cohesion</i></p>	<p>One life lesson that's especially important in the story is how important it is to be determined. For example, Mittens shows determination in facing his obstacles. He is tough when he meets the Bumblesnook. He is determined when he pushes through the fence. And he keeps going, making his way back to Queen Arabella.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level explore one theme across the story. Students are not yet able to name multiple themes, but can explain how one theme emerges in more than one part of the text. Some students may do this by showing the absence of the theme at the start of the story, and the presence of it by the end, while other students may cite a couple examples of the theme developing across the story.</i></p>	<p>One life lesson or theme that's especially important is that it's important to have determination. For example, Mittens is determined to return to Queen Arabella, and when he meets the scary Bumblesnook, he is tough and challenges it. When he gets stuck in the fence, he pushes through.</p> <p>Mittens also shows that loyalty is important. He learns to think more about Arabella than himself near the end of the story. He wishes for "her safety and happiness."</p> <p><i>Responses at this level name more than one theme that the story develops. Students can explain how parts of the text develop each theme and will reference specific details or quote the text. If asked, they can discuss the techniques that the author uses to highlight at least one of the themes.</i></p>	<p>There are two big life lessons or themes that are especially important so far in this story. One theme is that it's important to have determination. A second theme is that loyalty can make you brave.</p> <p>An example of how it's important to have determination is when Mittens doesn't let the fierce Bumblesnook stop him. He's also determined to get through the fence even though he is too fat. He wants to get back to Queen Arabella though, so he PUSHES through and makes it.</p> <p>Mittens' loyalty also makes him brave. For example, Mittens really wants to get back to Queen Arabella—at first because he misses her and then because he is worried about her. So he is brave with the Bumblesnook, and also brave when he enters the scary, awful "home of forgotten cats" and talks to the Old One to get answers to help save the Queen. The story shows that loyalty can make you brave.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level address more than one theme developed in the story, and will detail how parts of the text support each one. Students can weigh which themes are most strongly supported across the story and may write about literary devices, such as symbolism, that support the themes.</i></p>

Question	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
<p>4. "Runaway" and "Three's a Crowd" explore some similar theme/ life lessons. Compare and contrast a theme or lesson that is developed in both stories.</p> <p><i>Comparing and Contrasting Story Elements and Themes</i></p>	<p>The video and the story are both about loyalty. Mittens is loyal to Queen Arabella, and the man is loyal to Chillie. Mittens and the man both look for their friends, and realize how much they love them.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level discuss the similarities and differences between the story elements of two texts (in this case, the characters). They also identify a shared theme and explain the similarities and differences in how it is developed. This response does not address differences in how the theme is developed, but it is still a level 4.</i></p>	<p>Both the video and the story teach an important lesson, that it's important to be loyal. Both Mittens and the man in "Runaway" are loyal to their friends. Their actions show that they will do anything to find their friends again.</p> <p>One difference is that in the story, Mittens leaves Queen Arabella, and has to return to her, whereas in "Runaway," it is Chillie who leaves, and the man who has to find him.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level identify a shared theme and explain the similarities and differences in how it is developed. To do this, students discuss craft techniques each author uses to develop the theme.</i></p>	<p>Both the video and the story teach important lessons about how important loyalty is. For example, in the story, when Mittens is separated from Queen Arabella, he is determined to return to her, no matter what. In "Runaway," when the man finds Chillie missing, he sets out immediately to find him. They are both loyal.</p> <p>The story and the video both deal with the theme of loyalty, but the theme is developed in different ways. Mittens goes on a quest to return to the Queen and he overcomes obstacles, like the Bumblesnook. In the video, Chillie runs away and the man tries to find him, and his obstacles are small, like figuring out from small clues where Chillie is. The man has to be clever but he doesn't have to be brave like Mittens.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level identify a shared theme and explain the similarities and difference in how it is developed. To do this, students discuss craft techniques each author uses to develop the theme. If they are shown a multimedia and print version of the same text, they can also compare and contrast the effect the different versions have on the development of the theme.</i></p>