

Lesson 25

Comparing Topics and Themes in Stories



Learning Target



Comparing and contrasting similar themes and topics in stories from different parts of the world will help you better understand the stories and the people who tell them.

- **Read** Comparing and contrasting stories can help you make connections between **topics**, characters, events, and **themes** in **traditional literature**. These stories were originally passed down by word of mouth and were written down much later.

Traditional stories often share the same topic. For example, the **opposition**, or struggle, between good and evil is a common topic. The theme of a story is its message or lesson, which is told through the characters and events as the story unfolds.

Below are two stories with the same topic. Read each story and decide how they are similar and different.



The Jealous Bluebird

Rabbit and Mouse were best friends. But Bluebird, who was jealous, tried to separate them. "I will grant you each one wish," said Bluebird.

"I wish to travel to a faraway land," Rabbit said. Bluebird granted the wish, noting with a smirk that Rabbit did not wish he could also return.

But Mouse was not fooled. "I wish that my friend will always find his way home." And Bluebird had no choice but to grant this wish, too.

The Sad Frog

Once there lived a frog who wished she could fly. So she asked a heron to teach her. "Flying is easy," said the heron. "Just flap your wings like this." And the heron flew away before the frog could say, "But I have no wings."

The frog hopped away sadly, wishing for wings she could never have. She didn't realize that a snake near a rock had heard everything and was wishing he could hop as gracefully as the frog.



The Flask of Oil

an Indian folktale

A poor man received the gift of a large and valuable flask of oil from a kind and wealthy neighbor. Delighted, the poor man carefully put it onto the top shelf in his home. One evening, as he was gazing at it, he said, "If I should sell it, I could buy five sheep. Every year I should have lambs. If I sold the lambs, I would be rich enough to marry and perhaps have a son. And what a fine boy he would be! But if he should disobey me"—and he raised the staff in his hand—"I should punish him thus!" So saying, he swung the staff, knocking the flask off the shelf so that the oil ran over him from head to foot.

The Peasant and the Cucumbers

by Leo Tolstoy

A peasant once went to the gardener's to steal cucumbers. He crept up to the cucumbers and thought, "I will carry off a bag of cucumbers, which I will sell; with the money I will buy a hen. The hen will lay eggs, hatch them, and raise a lot of chicks. I will feed the chicks and sell them; then I will buy me a young sow, and she will bear a lot of pigs. I will sell the pigs and buy me a mare; the mare will foal me some colts. I will raise the colts and sell them. I will buy me a house and start a garden. In the garden I will sow cucumbers and will not let them be stolen but will keep a sharp watch on them. I will hire watchmen and put them in the cucumber patch, while I myself will come on them, unawares, and shout, 'Oh, there, keep a sharp lookout!'" And this he shouted as loud as he could. The watchmen heard it, and they rushed out and beat the peasant.

Close Reader Habits

As you read, **underline** important characters and events in each story that help you identify its topic and theme.

Explore

How are the topics and themes of the two tales similar? How are they different?



Compare and contrast what the characters learn at the end of each story.

Think

- 1 Compare and contrast the two stories by completing the chart below.

"The Flask of Oil"	"The Peasant and the Cucumbers"
Topic	
Characters	Characters
Events	Events
Theme	

Talk

- 2 Discuss your charts, and star any details you decide are similar in each story. Then discuss the lesson you learned from the men's experiences.

Write

- 3 **Short Response** Compare and contrast the way the events in the two stories develop similar themes. Use text evidence in your response. Use the space provided on page 420 to write your response.

HINT In what way are the men's dreams in the two stories alike?



Juvadi and the Princess

a folktale from Italy

- 1 Many, many years ago, as Juvadi the village fool strolled by the castle, he noticed a beautiful princess standing near a window. Upon hearing her lovely laugh, Juvadi whispered, “May you fall in love with me!” As usually occurs, the princess fell in love with him immediately.
- 2 Learning of their feelings, the ancient king became terribly embarrassed. He consulted his advisors, saying, “My daughter is in love with a fool. You are wise, so tell me how I should punish this shame!”
- 3 “Put them both into a wooden barrel and roll it over a cliff,” they answered. “Then you will never see them again.” At once the king commanded it to be done.
- 4 As the barrel rolled along, Juvadi cried, “Let me out—I’ll reward you with figs and raisins!” So saying, he threw handfuls of the luscious fruit out a hole in the barrel. Then coming to a level spot, the barrel stopped rolling. Juvadi broke it open, and the pair clambered out.
- 5 Coincidentally, a nearby frog saw this, and she laughed so hard that a wart on her neck disappeared. Happy to carry less weight, the frog called to Juvadi, “What is your wish? I can do anything and everything. Allow me to do something amazing for you.”
- 6 Quickly Juvadi replied, “We wish to be married, but we have no place to live. Kindly build us a humble cottage.”
- 7 Just as quickly the frog responded, “Watch as I turn this pebble into a palace, with all the comforts of the world.” Suddenly, a sparkling palace appeared out of thin air, and Juvadi and the princess entered it through its glittering gates.
- 8 The princess loved Juvadi, but she also knew him very well. “Soon,” she said, “I will indeed marry you. But first we must find a wish that will drive out your stupidity.”
- 9 Juvadi just grinned, because he loved her more than ever.

Close Reader Habits

What is each story about? Reread both stories, and **underline** the details that help you understand each story’s topic.

Hans and the Princess


a folktale from Germany

- 1 A king wished to know whom his daughter would marry. He sent his favorite dog to find her future husband. The dog dragged back Hans, the stupid village fool.
- 2 The embarrassed king put the princess and Hans in a casket and set them out to sea. The princess cried out, “You horrible fool. How is it that you are my future husband?”
- 3 “I wished for it,” said Hans. “All my wishes come true.”
- 4 “If that is so,” she said, “then wish us something to eat.” So Hans wished for a plate of potatoes, which she devoured.
- 5 Hans then said, “I wish for a grand ship.” They appeared on a proud vessel, fully crewed and forging back to land.
- 6 Upon reaching shore, Hans declared, “Here there shall be a castle, and within it shall dwell the princess and her handsome, intelligent husband.” Upon saying this, a castle appeared, and Hans became handsome and smart. The princess and Hans fell in love, married, and lived happily.
- 7 Years later, the princess’ father was out riding and stumbled upon the castle. The king did not recognize his daughter, but she knew him. She treated him well, but before he left, she hid a golden cup in his pocket. The princess then accused him of having stolen the cup.
- 8 The king protested that he did not know how the cup had come into his pocket. The princess said, “Do you see, now, how it feels to be treated unfairly?” She revealed herself as his daughter and forgave him. The king, overjoyed, named the princess and Hans as his heirs. Upon the king’s death, Hans and the princess became king and queen.



Close Reader Habits

What is the theme in each story? For each folktale, **circle** at least two words or phrases that tell something about each story’s message.

 **Think** Use what you learned from reading the folktales to respond to the following questions.

- 1 Which of the following statements is a theme expressed by both folktales?
 - A Putting your trust in a fool is a bad idea.
 - B Love can overcome unexpected challenges.
 - C Children should listen to the wisdom of their parents.
 - D Hard work is what helps even fools succeed.

- 2 Choose the statement that **best** tells how the king’s actions in each folktale contribute to the theme.
 - A He asked the fool to treat the princess like royalty.
 - B He ordered the fool to build a castle for his daughter.
 - C He demanded that the fool become handsome and intelligent.
 - D He created the problem that the fool had to handle.

- 3 Which of the following themes is developed in “Hans and the Princess” that is not developed in “Juvadi and the Princess”?
 - A It is important to treat people fairly.
 - B Parents should teach their children lessons.
 - C Children should forgive their parents.
 - D Doing things for other people is a good idea.

- 4 Reread paragraph 8 of “Hans and the Princess.” Find the sentence that describes the lesson the princess wanted to teach the king, and write it in the box below.

- 5** Compare the story events that help develop the theme in “Juvadi and the Princess” with those in “Hans and the Princess.” Draw Xs in the boxes next to details from each folktale. Some events appear in both tales.

Story Events	“Juvadi and the Princess”	“Hans and the Princess”
A frog helps a fool.		
A fool marries a princess.		
A king is embarrassed.		
A golden cup is found in a pocket.		
A fool rescues a princess.		
A princess and a fool live happily ever after.		



Many details in the stories are similar, but “Hans and the Princess” has a different ending. Think about how “Hans and the Princess” provides an additional theme.

Talk

- 6** Explain the similarities and differences in themes between “Juvadi and the Princess” and “Hans and the Princess.” Also describe how the characters learned lessons about life. Use a chart to organize your thoughts.

Write

- 7 Short Response** Use the information in your chart to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the topics and themes in the two folktales. Use at least **two** details from **each** tale to support your response. Use the space provided on page 421 to write your response.

HINT Choose the best way to structure your ideas to show similarities and differences.





Write Use the space below to write your answer to the question on page 415.

The **Flask** of **Oil**

The **Peasant** and the **Cucumbers**

3 Short Response Compare and contrast the way the events in the two stories develop similar themes. Use text evidence in your response.

HINT In what way are the men's dreams in the two stories alike?



Don't forget to check your writing.



Write Use the space below to write your answer to the question on page 419.

Juvadi and the Princess



7 Short Response Use the information in your chart to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the topics and themes in the two folktales. Use at least **two** details from **each** tale to support your response.

HINT Choose the best way to structure your ideas to show similarities and differences.

Check Your Writing

- Did you read the prompt carefully?
- Did you put the prompt in your own words?
- Did you use the best evidence from the text to support your ideas?
- Are your ideas clearly organized?
- Did you write in clear and complete sentences?
- Did you check your spelling and punctuation?

WORDS TO KNOW

As you read, look inside, around, and beyond these words to figure out what they mean.

- necessities
- annoyances
- service

The Two-Headed Weaver

a tale from *The Panchatantra*

- 1 In a certain place there lived a weaver by the name of Mantharaka, which means “the simpleton.” One day, while weaving cloth, the wooden pieces on his loom broke. He took an ax and set forth to find some wood. He found a large sissoo tree at the ocean’s shore, and said aloud, “Now this is a large tree. If I fell it, I will have wood enough for all my weaving tools.”
- 2 Having thus thought it through, he raised his ax to begin cutting. However, a spirit lived in this tree, and he said, “Listen! This tree is my home. . . .”
- 3 The weaver said, “Then what am I to do? If I don’t find a good tree, then my family will starve. You will have to go somewhere else. I am going to cut it down.”
- 4 The spirit answered, “Listen, I am at your service. Ask whatever you would like, but spare this tree!”
- 5 The weaver said, “If that is what you want then I will go home and ask my friend and my wife, and when I return, you must give me what I ask for.”

6 The spirit promised, and the weaver, beside himself with joy, returned home. Upon his arrival in his city he saw his friend, the barber, and said, “Friend, I have gained control over a spirit. Tell me what I should demand from him!”

7 The barber said, “My dear friend, if that is so then you should demand a kingdom. You could be king, and I would be your prime minister. . . .”

8 The weaver spoke, “Friend, so be it! But let us also ask my wife.”

9 Having said this, he went quickly to his wife and said to her, “Dear one, today I have gained control over a spirit who will grant me one wish. Hence I have come to ask for your advice. Tell me, what should I ask for? My friend the barber thinks that I should request a kingdom.”

10 She answered, “Oh, son of your excellence . . . a king’s life is an unending procession of annoyances. He must constantly worry about friendships, animosities, wars, servants, defense alliances, and duplicity. . . . Never envy the life of a king.”

11 The weaver said, “You are right. But what should I ask for?”

12 She answered, “You can now work on only one piece of cloth at a time. That is barely enough to pay for the necessities. You should ask for another pair of arms and a second head so that you can work on two pieces of cloth at once, one in front of you, and one behind you. . . .”

13 After hearing this he spoke with joy, “Good, you faithful wife! You have spoken well, and I will do what you say. That is my decision.”

14 With that he went to the spirit and let his will be known, “Listen, if you want to fulfill my wish, then give me another pair of arms and another head.”

15 He had barely spoken before he was two-headed and four-armed. Rejoicing, he returned home, but the people there thought that he was a demon and beat him with sticks and stones, until he fell over dead. . . .

WORDS TO KNOW

As you read, look inside, around, and beyond these words to figure out what they mean.

- **impatience**
- **former**

THE RIDICULOUS WISHES

by Charles Perrault,
Old Time Stories Told by Master Charles Perrault

- 1 There was once a poor woodcutter who, tired of his hard life . . . declared that in all his days heaven had not granted even one of his wishes. One day in the woods, as the woodcutter was complaining of his unhappy lot, Jupiter appeared before him, his thunderbolts in his hands. . . .
- 2 “Have no fear,” said Jupiter. “I have heard your complaints and I have come to show you how unfairly you judge me. Now listen! I am king of all the world and I promise to grant your first three wishes, no matter what they may be. . . .”
- 3 With these words, Jupiter returned to his heavens and the happy woodcutter, taking up his bundle of sticks, hurried to his home. “This is an important matter,” he said to himself. “I certainly must have my wife’s advice.”



- 4 “Hey, Fanchon,” he shouted, as he entered his cottage. “Light us up a good fire. We are rich for the rest of our lives. All we have to do is to make three wishes!”
- 5 With this, he told his wife what had happened, whereupon she in her imagination began to form a thousand plans. “Blaise, my dear, let us not spoil anything by our impatience. We must think things over very carefully. Let us put off our first wish until tomorrow. Let us sleep on it.”
- 6 “I think you are right,” said he. . . . Relaxing, he leaned back in his chair before the fire. “To match such a fine blaze,” he said, “I wish we had a measure of sausage. It would go very well indeed!”
- 7 Scarcely had he spoken these words when his wife, to her great astonishment, saw a long link of sausage moving over to them like a snake from the chimney corner. She cried out in alarm, but realizing at once that this was the result of the wish which her foolish husband had made, she began to . . . scold him angrily. “When you might,” she said, “have a kingdom, with gold, pearls, rubies, diamonds, fine clothes; and all you wish for is a sausage!”



8 “Alas,” her husband replied. “I was wrong, I made a very bad choice. I admit my mistake. Next time I will do better.”

9 “Yes! Yes!” said his wife . . . “To make such a choice as you did, you must be a donkey.”

10 At this the husband became very angry. . . . “A curse on this and all sausages. I wish that it was hanging from the end of your nose!”

11 The wish was heard at once . . . and the sausage fastened itself on her nose. Fanchon had once been pretty, and—to tell the truth—this ornament did not have a very pleasing effect. . . .

12 “With my remaining wish I could very well still make myself a king,” he said to himself. “But we must think of the queen, too, and her unhappiness if she were to sit on the throne with her new yard-long nose. She must decide which she wants, to be a queen with that nose or a woodcutter’s wife and an ordinary person.”

13 Whereupon his wife agreed that they had no choice. She would never have the riches and diamonds and fine clothes she had dreamed of, but she would be herself again if the last wish would free her from the frightful sausage on her nose.

14 And so the woodcutter did not change his lot. He did not become a king. His purse was not filled with gold. He was only too glad to use his remaining wish in restoring his poor wife to her former state.

Think Use what you learned from reading the folktales to respond to the following questions.

- 1** Which sentence **best** describes the theme that the two folktales share?
 - A** If you work hard, you will be ready for luck when it comes.
 - B** People can overcome unexpected challenges.
 - C** Having riches does not always make people happy.
 - D** People should think before they speak or act.

- 2** Underline **one** sentence from **each** passage that develops this topic: A person’s wishes end up making trouble.

from “The Two-Headed Weaver”	from “The Ridiculous Wishes”
<p>With that he went to the spirit and let his will be known, “Listen, if you want to fulfill my wish, then give me another pair of arms and another head.”</p> <p>He had barely spoken before he was two-headed and four-armed. Rejoicing, he returned home, but the people there thought he was a demon and beat him with sticks and stones, until he fell over dead. . . .</p>	<p>“Yes! Yes!” said his wife . . . “To make such a choice as you did, you must be a donkey.”</p> <p>At this the husband became very angry. . . . “A curse on this and all sausages. I wish that it was hanging from the end of your nose!”</p> <p>The wish was heard at once . . . and the sausage fastened itself on her nose. Fanchon had once been pretty, and—to tell the truth—this ornament did not have a very pleasing effect. . . .</p>

- 3** The sentences below are from paragraph 10 of “The Two-Headed Weaver.” Underline the word that means “feel jealous of.”

. . . a king’s life is an unending procession of annoyances. He must constantly worry about friendships, animosities, wars, servants, defense alliances Never envy the life of a king.”



- 4** Which of the following describes an important difference between “The Two-Headed Weaver” and “The Ridiculous Wishes”?
- A** “The Two-Headed Weaver” teaches that friends and family are a good source of advice. “The Ridiculous Wishes” teaches that people should trust themselves before listening to others.
 - B** “The Two-Headed Weaver” teaches that accepting who you are can make you happy. “The Ridiculous Wishes” teaches that it is important to keep changing and improving.
 - C** “The Two-Headed Weaver” teaches that people who change their lives can face problems. “The Ridiculous Wishes” teaches that people who accept their lives can be happy.
 - D** “The Two-Headed Weaver” teaches that beauty matters more than riches. “The Ridiculous Wishes” teaches that riches matter more than beauty.

 **Write**

The tales “The Two-Headed Weaver” and “Ridiculous Wishes” have important similarities and differences. Write a response that compares and contrasts the topics and themes in the two folktales.

- 5 Plan Your Response** How are the topics, events, characters, and themes in both tales similar? How are they different? Use a chart like the one on page 415 to collect your thoughts before you write.
- 6 Write an Extended Response** Use evidence from both texts and information from your chart to compare and contrast how each folktale develops its topic and theme.
