

Name _____

Date _____

Multiple Themes

Theme is the central message or life lesson that an author communicates in a literary work. It must be inferred by analyzing characters, conflicts, and outcomes rather than being directly stated. **Common themes** include courage, friendship, growing up, and the battle between good and evil.

Read the following short story and answer the questions.

The Wall Between Us

Mateo glared across the soccer field at Zach, the new kid who had transferred from the private school across town. Everyone was making such a big deal about him—star athlete, perfect grades, designer clothes. It didn't help that Zach now lived in the large house at the end of Mateo's street, the one with the wrought-iron fence that separated their neighborhoods.

"You're playing with Zach today," Coach Garcia announced, pointing at Mateo. "Show him our practice drills."

Mateo groaned inwardly but nodded. As they practiced passing, Mateo was surprised by Zach's awkwardness with the ball.

"Sorry, I'm not very good," Zach admitted. "At my old school, I mostly sat on the bench. Coach only put me on the team because my dad made a big donation."

After practice, Mateo spotted Zach walking home alone, shoulders slumped. Impulsively, he caught up with him.

"Want to practice at the park sometime?" Mateo offered. "I could help you with your footwork."

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Zach's face brightened. "That would be amazing. Everyone thinks I'm this perfect athlete, but I'm terrified of letting the team down."

As they reached the iron fence dividing their neighborhoods, Zach hesitated. "This fence always made me feel like I don't belong here."

"It's just a fence," Mateo replied, seeing it differently for the first time. "There's a gate right here." He pushed it open and they walked through together.

Over the next few weeks, they met daily at the park. Zach improved at soccer, while Mateo discovered Zach could help him with math. When the championship game arrived, they assisted each other in scoring the winning goal. And the fence between their houses? It no longer seemed to matter at all.

- 1. How does Mateo's opinion of Zach change from the beginning to the end of the story?**
- 2. What does the wrought-iron fence represent in the story, and how does it change in meaning by the end?**
- 3. What themes can be inferred from Mateo and Zach's journey, and how do their actions reflect these themes?**

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Multiple Themes – Answer Key

1. How does Mateo's opinion of Zach change from the beginning to the end of the story?

At first, Mateo views Zach negatively, judging him as a privileged and idealized newcomer who doesn't belong. By the end of the story, Mateo realizes Zach is insecure and struggling, like everyone else. Their friendship grows as they help each other improve, and Mateo sees Zach as a teammate and friend rather than someone divided by status.

2. What does the wrought-iron fence represent in the story, and how does it change in meaning by the end?

The fence symbolizes division—social, economic, and personal barriers between Mateo and Zach. Initially, Mateo sees the fence as a separator that highlights their differences. However, as their friendship develops, the fence loses its significance, and walking through the gate together represents overcoming those divisions and forming a connection.

3. What themes can be inferred from Mateo and Zach's journey, and how do their actions reflect these themes?

The story conveys multiple themes:

- **Breaking Barriers:** Mateo and Zach overcome physical and symbolic divisions, symbolized by the fence.
- **Friendship and Collaboration:** They help each other improve in soccer and academics, showing mutual support and teamwork.
- **Judging Others and Misconceptions:** Mateo learns not to judge Zach based on appearances and assumptions, realizing Zach's struggles and humanity. Their actions—practicing together, opening the gate, and succeeding in the championship—demonstrate these themes of understanding, growth, and connection.