

# SMART™ Lesson

## Identifying Themes in Early Literature

Themes are universal ideas that are explored in literature. They can be ideas about the human experience, society, morality, or anything else that is relevant and resonant with the human experience. In early literature, the themes can be very different from the ones we have today, but they are no less important.

### Examples of Themes in Early Literature

One of the earliest examples of English literature is the epic poem *Beowulf*, which was written in Old English in the 8th century. The themes in this poem are centered around heroism, loyalty, and the battle between good and evil. Other examples of themes in early literature include:

- Love and marriage
- Religion and faith
- Power and politics
- Injustice and revenge
- Life and death

### Identifying Themes

Identifying themes in literature is an important skill that helps readers gain a deeper understanding of the text. To identify the theme of a work, start by looking for patterns or recurring ideas in the story. Ask yourself what message the author is trying to convey through these motifs.

One way to identify themes is to analyze the characters and their motivations. What do they want? What are they willing to do to get it? What values do they hold? These questions can help you identify underlying themes such as greed, power, or love.

### Discussion Questions

1. What is a theme in literature?
2. What are some common themes found in early literature?
3. How can analyzing the characters in a story help you identify its themes?
4. Can different readers interpret the same story differently?
5. How important is it to identify the themes in a work of literature?