Themes in Rikki Tikki Tavi

*Read this sheet and answer the questions BEFORE beginning your essay. This will help you identify & consider the themes in the story. You can write the answers on the sheet or type them in a word document.*

**Courage**

Courage sets Rikki-tikki apart from the other characters. He fearlessly jumps into a battle with Karait to save Teddy from certain death. He is afraid of the cobras, but is able to overcome his fear to follow Nagaina into her den and fight her to the death. Characters who are not brave are treated very scornfully.

1. Using BLUE, go through the hard copy of the story and highlight any scenes or examples that you think relate to the theme of courage.
2. What do you think the author is trying to say about courage in this story? What LESSON or MESSAGE do you think he wants the reader to take away about courage?
3. Who else shows courage in this story apart from Rikki Tikki Tavi? How do they show it?

1. Do you think Nagaina is a courageous character or not? Explain your answer with evidence from the story.
2. Draw up a table with 3 columns: brave characters, cowardly characters, neutral characters. Sort every character in the story into one of the columns: Mum (Alice), Dad (“The Big Man”), Teddy, Nag, Nagaina, Rikki Tikki, Chuchundra, Darzee, Darzee’s wife, Karait, The Coppersmith Bird

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Cowardly characters | Neutral characters | Brave characters |
|  |  |  |

**Good vs. Evil**

It’s very clear in this story which characters are ‘good,’ and which are ‘evil’. Rikki Tikki is described as valiant and fearless, fighting to protect the innocent people of the bungalow, especially Teddy. The snakes are portrayed as vicious and nasty, wanting to kill the humans so they can become the undisputed rules of the garden. But things are not always as black and white as they seem on the surface.

1. Using PINK OR ORANGE, go through the story and highlight any scenes or examples that you think relate to the theme of ‘good vs evil’.
2. What do you think the author is trying to say about good vs evil in this story? What lesson or message do you think he wants the reader to take away about good and evil?
3. Do you think nature is seen as a force for good or evil in this story? Why?
4. Would you say Darzee and Chuchundra are good characters or evil ones? Explain your reasoning.
5. Nag points out to Rikki-tikki, "You eat eggs. Why should not I eat birds?" What do you think – does he have a point? Why is it ok for Rikki but not for Nag?
6. Snakes are often used as a symbol of evil in stories and films. Why do you think this is? Can you think of any other stories, myths, or folk tales that portray snakes as evil?

**Loyalty and Duty**

Rikki is loyal to the human family that takes him in, and his loyalty drives him to protect them from the cobras, even to the point of risking death. Rikki also risks death out of a sense of duty regarding his heritage as a mongoose: when he attacks Nag he "was battered to and fro.… he made sure he would be banged to death, and, for the honour of his family, he preferred to be found with his teeth locked."

1. Using YELLOW, go through the story and highlight any scenes or examples that you think relate to the theme of loyalty.
2. What do you think the author is trying to say about loyalty in this story? What lesson or message do you think he wants the reader to take away about loyalty?
3. Why is Rikki Tikki so loyal to the human family? What are his motivations (reasons) for wanting to protect them?
4. Who else shows loyalty in this story apart from Rikki Tikki? How do they show it?
5. Find all the references in the story to Rikki Tikki’s mother. What did she teach him about a mongoose’s duty or purpose in life?
6. Which do you think has the BIGGEST influence on Rikki Tikki’s actions: his natural instincts, his mother’s teaching about his duty, or his loyalty to the family? Why?