

Skill: ANALYZING THEME IN MYTHS**Objectives:**

- Students analyze, make inferences, and draw conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts.
- Students summarize and explain the lesson or message of a work of fiction as its theme.
- Students describe the phenomena explained in origin myths from various cultures.

Resource:

Cycle 13 book, *The Desert's Gift*

Features of Myths

Explain that a myth is a story that explains an idea or belief of a group of people. **Many myths tell about the gods people worship or give examples of behavior that is good or evil. Some myths, called origin myths, explain how something in nature came to exist or why it looks or acts as it does. Myths often include characters with special abilities or powers and miraculous events.**

Point out the section in *The Desert's Gift* that is in italic type and explain that it is a story within a story.

In *The Desert's Gift*, a grandfather tells an origin myth to his grandson. As I read the story to you, listen to find out what the myth within the story explains about nature.

Read the story aloud and help students decide what the myth explains. **What special abilities do the characters in the myth have?** (The cactus and the animals can talk and the girl can talk to animals.)

What miraculous events happen in the myth? (A cactus grew from the place where the dove was buried with flowers the color of the dove. The cactus disappears when people throw rocks at birds that ate the cactus fruit.) **What does the myth explain about how something came to be?** (It explains how saguaro cactus came to be because of the kindness of a dove and little girl.)

Theme

Point out that many stories have a message or lesson. **We sometimes call those messages themes.** Themes are connected to familiar or important parts of life. Change, love, courage, friendship, and nature are just a few of the big ideas a story's message can be about. An author uses the events in a story and the characters' actions and feelings to show or explain a theme. Discuss the way characters act in the saguaro myth and the consequences, good and bad. **How do the dove and the girl treat each other?** (with kindness and respect) **What is the reward for their actions?** (a cactus with delicious flowers grows where the girl buries the dove) **Why does the cactus disappear?** (People become greedy about the fruit and throw rocks at birds that try to eat it.) **What is the punishment for the selfishness of the people?** (The cactus disappears and they have no fruit.) **Why and how do the people change?** (The cactus tells them it will not grow where people are unkind to birds. They agree to share the fruits with all living creatures.) **What are some ways we could express the message, or theme, of the myth?** (Possible answers: People should respect all living things; Kindness will be rewarded and selfishness will be punished.)