

# Using Motifs to Collect and Sort Evidence

Lesson

3

## STRATEGY

Literary essayists know that focusing on parts of a story that demonstrate an overall motif casts a wider net for collecting evidence than a narrower thesis statement. Sometimes, therefore, writers consider motifs connected to their theses and use those motifs to find and categorize evidence.

**USE THIS STRATEGY...** when essayists could use more evidence for certain parts of their thesis or when a student's thesis feels too narrow to lead to several parts of a text (which may prompt them to revise their thesis). You can also use it when students have lots of evidence and are thinking about ways to categorize it.

- For a lesson on growing ideas about motifs, see Shifting from Motifs to Thesis Statements in [Chapter 2](#).

Visit [hs-guidetoteaching.org](https://hs-guidetoteaching.org) to download the chart of common literary motifs.

## TEACH THE STRATEGY

- Suggest to students that just as readers investigate motifs in stories, writers can return to motifs to find and categorize evidence.
- Review the definition of motif, explaining that motifs can be repeated images, objects, symbols, or ideas. Share a chart of literary motifs that often appear in novels.
- Display your thesis for students. Invite students to join you in asking: What are some motifs that show up in the text that can relate to this thesis? Demonstrate how you use these motifs to guide your search for evidence. Skim through the text, finding a section to reread, asking yourself: Are any of my motifs present here?

## Using Motifs to Collect and Sort Evidence.

### Thesis:

Xiomara's shifts between Spanish and English in her poetry demonstrate how she is caught between two lives: the confined life her parents want for her, and the life of freedom she wants for herself.

#### Confinement

"When your...I am" (p. 5)

"The words...face" (p. 16)

"Assignment" (p. 41)

#### Freedom

"How...boy" (p. 33)

"As I lie...edge" (p. 34)

"Today...ear" (p. 46)

#### Translanguaging

"Mami...house" (p. 42)

"He's been...ten" (p. 43)

"When we were little...fights" (p. 41)

## Lesson 3 (Continued)

When Coley demonstrated with her class, she generated a chart with several motifs and moved some evidence from her notes in the book into the chart. Coley then thought aloud about how she could add to her thesis and revised it in orange.

- Invite writers to try this work out with their own theses, offering it as a way to search for more evidence and to categorize evidence.

### PROMPTS TO COACH STUDENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

*A lot of motifs are shared across narratives. It can help to start by considering some common motifs, asking if these run through your story—and which might relate to your thesis.*

*Could you organize your essay around these motifs? Does this work as the starting point of an outline?*

*Sometimes, you find more evidence for a motif that fascinates you than for your original thesis. If this is the case, you may want to revise your thesis.*

### CLASSROOM ARTIFACTS

#### Literary Motifs that Appear Often in Novels

Loneliness	Isolation	Regret
Liberation	Transformation	Self-doubt
Oppression	Desire	Resilience
Abandonment	Betrayal	Forgiveness
Entrapment	Sacrifice	Free will
Love	Power	Resistance