

Grade 6 / Week 7

Standards Covered this Week

- LAFS.6.L.3.4.a:** Determine the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- LAFS.6.L.3.4.d:** Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).
- LAFS.6.RL.1.2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- LAFS.6.RI.2.6:** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

Name

Teacher: Mazyck

A Note to Parents

This week, we are continuing our unit entitled "Embracing Our Differences," revisiting the short story "Fish Cheeks," and are reading an excerpted memoir titled "Unusual Normality" by Ishmael Beah. Your student will be considering the themes of identity, friendship, and being different with this text and will be focusing on the skills of determining theme and how an author develops his or her point of view.

Here are some *optional* online resources to support or extend your student's thinking:

- Online version of "Unusual Normality" <https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/fyc-unusual-normality> (Your student can also access this text through their CommonLit account on ClassLink and can even have access to an audio version or translation tool for the text.)
- Information about the author along with several video interviews about his past experiences and his book (<https://us.macmillan.com/author/ishmaelbeah/>)

Based on the context sentence and the photo, write down your best prediction for the definition of each word.

1. Conduct (kuhn-duhkt)

The mom told her son she hopes he will conduct himself well while sitting in church.

Definition prediction: _____ to behave

I guessed "behave" because the tigers are fighting (bad behavior) and kids sometimes get in trouble for not behaving in church

Correct definition: _____



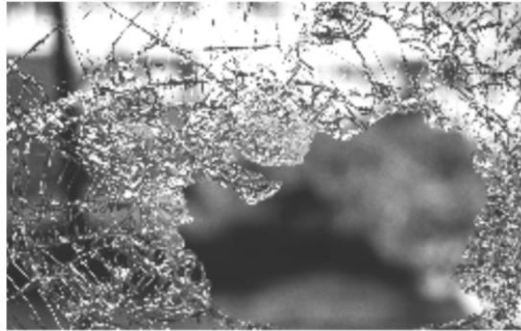
The zoo keeper was alarmed at the way the tigers conducted themselves.

2. Predict (pri-dikt)

Since Carlos does the same thing everyday, you can predict where he will be at any given time.

Definition prediction: _____

Correct definition: _____



Knowing his mother, Sam predicted she would be furious at the broken window.

3. Survival (ser-vahy-vuh l)

Food, shelter, and clean water are necessary for survival.

Definition prediction: _____

Correct definition: _____



The survival of the Terracotta Warriors after thousands of years is amazing.

Below are the dictionary definitions for the above vocabulary words. Fill in corresponding definitions. Were your predictions close?

1. To behave (oneself) or carry out a task in a specific way
2. To know or say what will happen in the future
3. The state of continuing to live or exist despite danger or struggle

Day 1, Activity 2: Unit Skills

Mini-Lesson: Determining Theme in "Fish Cheeks"

You'll need the text from last week to complete this activity.

Skills Focus: In Week 5's fable entitled "The Farmer and the Viper," the **theme** of the story was stated as the last sentence of the story. However, very few other texts actually state their theme as a sentence in the story. Today, you'll be learning more about determining theme in a normal short story, and you will practice by using the short story from Week 6, "Fish Cheeks."

- The **theme** is the message an author expresses throughout a text.
 - A theme is **universal**; it can apply to real life and to multiple other texts.
 - A theme does **not** include references to a text's characters or plot.
- The word cloud to the right represents frequently addressed big ideas.
- The table below lists the steps for determining a theme as well as shows an example of determining a theme using one of the big ideas that is addressed in "Fish Cheeks."



Determining Theme	
1	Identify a big idea in the text. To do this, think about the important characters, conflicts, and events. <p style="text-align: center;">Identity</p>
2	<p>Ask ourselves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where does this big idea show up in the text? <i>Amy, the narrator, is ashamed of her family and identity at the beginning of the story. In the end, she appreciates what her mother tries to tell her about being proud of who she is.</i> What is the author saying about this big idea? <i>I think the author is trying to say that it is important to be proud of your identity, even when it makes you different from other people.</i>
3	<p>Use a prompt to draft a theme statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "[Big idea] can..." "It's right/wrong to... / "You should..." "It's difficult to..." "If..., then..." <p><i>You should be proud of your unique identity, even when it makes you different from other people.</i></p>

Notice how this response:
Summarizes examples from the story that connect to the big idea of "identity."

Notice how this response:
States the author's message in a general way, without naming specific characters or events from the story.

Notice that this theme statement:

- ✓ Uses the word "identity," because it's based on that big idea.
- ✓ Is universal. It can apply to real life and to other texts.
- ✓ Can be supported by evidence from "Fish Cheeks," but it doesn't refer to specific characters or events from the story.

Independent Practice: Complete each step in the table below using one of the following big ideas to determine another theme for "Fish Cheeks." Big Idea Options: **FAMILY** or **DIFFERENCES & DIVERSITY**

"Fish Cheeks"	
1	Identify a big idea in the text. To do this, think about the characters, conflicts, and events.
2	<p>Ask yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where does this big idea show up in the text? <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the author trying to say about this big idea? <hr/> <hr/>
3	<p>Use a prompt to draft a theme statement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "[Big idea] can ..." ■ "It's right / wrong to ..." / "You should ..." ■ "It's difficult to ..." ■ "If ... , then ..." <hr/> <hr/>

Day 2: Quick Write

How do you think war affects a child? Try to be detailed in your answer.

Day 3 & 4: “Unusual Normality”

Now, you’re going to read an excerpt of a memoir titled “Unusual Normality” written by Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier from Sierra Leone. In 1991, the Sierra Leone civil war started. Rebels invaded Beah’s hometown. He was eventually forced to be a child soldier for three years before being rescued by United Nations Children’s Fund.

During reading, you will analyze how the author develops his point of view.



1 *The author, Ishmael Beah*



2 Sierra Leone on a map

“Unusual Normality” by Ishmael Beah

[1] I came to New York City in 1998. I was seventeen.

[2] I entered the United States with just a passport in my hand, because somehow the baggage that I'd checked when I boarded the flight from Ivory Coast (which was tattered in ways unimaginable) didn't make it.

[3] I stood there at the luggage rack watching all these huge bags go by, and mine didn't come. This bag held all my possessions at this point: two pairs of pants and two shirts—one long-sleeved and one short. So I just started laughing, and I didn't even bother going to the lost-baggage section to claim it.

[4] I just walked right out to meet my new adoptive mother, who was standing there with a beaming smile, waiting for me. And I explained to her what had happened, and we laughed some more.

[5] We left and went into Manhattan, and that evening we went to Kmart. (After we had had Chinese food and a fortune cookie that said, "You're about to have new clothes.")

[6] And I thought to myself, *What a great omen.*¹ *Fresh new start to everything.*

[7] I was coming from a country called Sierra Leone. At age eleven, a war had started in my country. At twelve I had become an orphan, because my mother, father, and two brothers had been killed in that war. At thirteen I was fighting as a soldier in that same war. At sixteen, after three years of war, I'd been removed from all that and had gone through rehabilitation,² where I began learning how to deal with the memories of the war.

[8] So from this experience, I had come to the United States. To have a new home, and to live with a mother who was willing to take me into her life when most people at the time were afraid of somebody like me.

[9] It was a chance at living again, because all I had come to know, since I was eleven, was how to **survive**. I didn't know how to live. All I knew, really, up until this point in my life, was struggle. This was what I had come to expect from life, and I didn't trust in happiness or any kind of normality at all.

¹ **Omen** (*noun*): a sign of what will happen in the future

² **Rehabilitation** (*noun*): a process of becoming healthy and active after a bad experience

Paragraphs 1-6

Write: How would you describe the author's reaction to losing his things? How does his reaction relate to the title of this memoir?

Paragraphs 7-9

Write: Summarize the events that influenced the author's past identity.

POINT OF VIEW: Paragraphs 1-9

Find Evidence: Underline or highlight 1-2 sentences that reveals the author's perspective on moving to a new country.

[10] So here I was in New York, with my new mother. We needed to step into that normality.³

[11] But we had a lot of things to deal with, and one of the most pressing⁴ ones was that I needed to get into school. You see, the visa that I had been given was a prospective-student visa. This meant that when I arrived in the United States, I had three months to get into a school. If I didn't, I would be returned to my war-torn⁵ country, Sierra Leone.

[12] Now, when I arrived, it was in the summer, so all the schools were closed. But my mother got on the phone and called every school principal she could think of in Manhattan, and tried to get them to grant me an interview.

[13] When I went to some of the interviews, I was immediately denied because of the following conversation:

[14] "Do you have a report card to show that you had been in school?"

[15] I would say, "No, but I know I have been in school."

[16] And then my mother would interject⁶ to explain the context.⁷

[17] I would sit there thinking to myself, *What do these school principals think? Do they really think that when there's a war in your village or when your town is attacked, and people are gunned down in front of you, and you're running for your life, you're thinking to yourself, "You know, I must take my report card and put it in the back of my pocket."*

[18] At some of these interviews, I was able to say some of these things, thinking that it would be funny. But the school principals didn't find it funny. I learned a new American term for what they *did* find it. They were "weirded out" by the strange sense of humor that I had about this.

[19] So I decided that I was going to write an entrance essay about this, and the essay was simply titled "Why I Do Not Have a Report Card."

[20] With this essay, along with exams that were given to me, I was accepted to the United Nations International School and placed in the eleventh grade.

³ **Normality** (*noun*): the state of being normal

⁴ **Pressing** (*adjective*): most important or urgent

⁵ a country or city destroyed by the effects of war

⁶ **Interject** (*verb*): to interrupt someone suddenly

⁷ **Context** (*noun*): the situation or background

[21] Thus began my two years of high school and making other teenagers confused about who I was. You see, I didn't fit into any box. I didn't have the same worries about what shoes or clothes I wore. And so my teenage counterparts⁸ always wanted to find out why I was like that. Why I didn't worry about my essays or exams or things.

[22] And of course I couldn't tell them, because I felt that they were not ready to hear the truth. What was I going to say?

[23] During a break from class, "Hey, you know, I was a child soldier at thirteen. Let's go back to class now."

[24] So I was silent, mostly. I didn't say much. I would just smile. And this made them more curious.

[25] They would say to me, "You're such a weird kid."

[26] And I would respond by saying, "No, no, no. I'm not *weird*. *Weird* has a negative connotation.⁹ I prefer the word *unusual*. It has a certain sophistication¹⁰ and gravitas¹¹ to it that suits my character."

[27] And of course when I was finished saying this, they would look at me and say, "Why don't you speak like a normal person?"

Paragraph 11

Write: What was especially challenging about enrolling in school?

Paragraphs 13-18

Find Evidence: Underline or highlight two reasons why many principals did not admit him to their schools.

Paragraphs 21-29

Write: List two details about the author that made his classmates view him as unusual.

[28] The reason I spoke like this was because of my British-African English that I'd learned, which was the only formal English that I knew. So whenever I spoke, people felt ill at ease, particularly my fellow teenagers. They thought, *What is wrong with this fellow?*¹²

[29] Some of them, though, didn't find it as strange. They thought maybe my English was like this because I was from some royal African family.

[30] So throughout my high-school years, I tried to make my English less formal, so that my friends would not feel disturbed by it. (However, I did not **dispute** the fact that I was from some royal African family or that I was a prince. Because, you see, sometimes some stereotypes¹³ have their benefits, and I certainly took advantage of that.)

[31] But I needed to be silent about my background, because I also felt like I was being watched. When I got into the school, some of the other parents were not very happy that somebody with my background was in school with their children. And I realized that the way I **conducted** myself would determine whether they would ever let another child who had been through war into such a school.

[32] But even with all of these attitudes, and with my silence, I started making friends. To them it was sufficient¹⁴ that I was just some kid who lived in the East Village, who was from an African country.

⁸ A counterpart is a person or thing that closely resembles another person or thing, for example two people of the same age.

⁹ **Connotation** (*noun*): a feeling beyond its meaning

¹⁰ **Sophistication** (*noun*): the feeling of being advanced or more refined

¹¹ seriousness

¹² an old-fashioned word for man

¹³ **Stereotype** (*noun*): a belief that all members of a group share common traits

¹⁴ **Sufficient** (*adjective*): a good amount of good enough

POINT OF VIEW: Paragraphs 21-32

A. **Write:** What is the author's attitude on sharing his background?

B. **Find Evidence:** Underline or highlight two details that reveal his attitude toward sharing his background.

[33] And these kids were tough (they told me). Because they lived in a tough city, New York. And therefore *they* were tough.

[34] They had been to the Bronx. They had been to Bed-Stuy. They had taken the train there. They had gotten into fights and won.

[35] So they would say things to me like, "If you want to **survive** the streets of New York City, we need to teach you a few things."

[36] And I'd be like, "Okay, sure. I'm open to learning."

[37] And they would tell me things about how to be tough and stuff, and I would say, "Well, thank you very much. I truly appreciate this advice that you're giving me."

[38] They were like, "No worries, our African brother. Anytime, any time."

[39] Truth was, I'd been to some of these places that they spoke about, these neighborhoods, and I knew that the people who lived there didn't glorify¹⁵ violence the way they did. They didn't have time to pretend, because they lived in it, just like I had.

[40] I noticed that these kids had a sort of *idea* of violence that they'd never really *lived*. They glorified it in a way, because they'd never actually experienced it at all.

[41] When I walked with them, I observed that I paid more attention to the people who walked past us—how the person walked, which way they were coming from. I didn't take the same route twice, because I didn't want to develop a **predictable** path. These were all habits that were formed from my experiences, but I noticed that my new friends didn't do that at all. So I knew they were just saying these things to seem tough to me.

[42] Now, I did enjoy listening to my new friends that I had made. I enjoyed listening to them tremendously,¹⁶ because I wished, when I listened to them, that the only violence I knew was the violence that I imagined.

Paragraph 33

Write: Who thought the kids were "tough"?

Paragraph 40

Write: What does the author mean that his friends "glorified" violence "because they'd never actually experienced it"?

[43] And listening to them allowed me to experience childhood in a way that I hadn't known was possible. It let me be a normal kid.

[44] So I listened to them, and we hung out all the time, and through that I participated in what was left of my childhood.

[45] I got to be a child again with them; the only worries that we had were when we went Rollerblading without any protective gear. We took our brakes off, and sometimes we would avoid hitting an old lady by falling into a trash can on the street, and we laughed about it.

[46] These things meant a lot to me.

¹⁵ **Glorify** (*verb*): to make something important or to praise it as good

¹⁶ **Tremendous** (*adjective*): very great in size or amount

[47] After about a year of being friends with these boys, one of them decided to invite a group of us, about ten of us, to upstate New York. His family had property up there, and he said we were going there for the weekend to play a game called paintball.

[48] I said, "Well, what is that?"

[49] And he said, "Oh, man, you've never played paintball? You're gonna love it. It's a great game. The fellows and I, we always play it. And don't worry, we'll teach it to you, and we'll protect you.

[50] "You use these balls of paint, and you shoot people," and he explained the basics of the game to me.

[51] I said, "Okay, that sounds interesting."

[52] And I thought, *If these guys who only pretend about violence can play it, it must not be that difficult a game.*

[53] But of course I didn't say this. I just thought these things. So I went with them upstate to a humongous¹⁷ property that had trees and creeks that ran into a bigger river—this beautiful open place.

[54] But as soon as we arrived, I began to memorize the terrain¹⁸ immediately, and this was from habit. I knew how many paces it took to get to the house, how many paces¹⁹ it took to the first tree, to the first bush, to the shed. I learned the spaces between the trees.

[55] Overnight, while everybody was sleeping, I tried to replay some of these things in my head — to memorize the terrain.

[56] And this was all out of habit, because where I came from, in my previous life, this kind of skill set could determine whether you lived or died.

[57] In the morning, at breakfast, they were pumped up.

[58] Everyone was saying, "Yeah, the game is gonna be awesome today."

[59] And so after we finished breakfast, I was introduced to the game of paintball. They showed me the weapon, how you can shoot it. And I allowed them to teach me to shoot things.

[60] They were very macho²⁰ about it.

[61] They said to me, "This is how you shoot, you aim like this."

[62] I said, "Okay." I tried it a few times. I deliberately²¹ missed.

[63] Then they showed me the camouflage and the combat gear and everything.

[64] And then everybody was ready to go, and they were amped up, and all like, "Yeah, we're gonna go out! We're gonna DO THIS!!"

[65] They decided we were going to play one-on-one. And then, after, we would play team games.

¹⁷ **Humongous** (*adjective*): very large

¹⁸ **Terrain** (*noun*): land

¹⁹ **Paces** (*noun*): steps

²⁰ a term that means behaving aggressively or acting overly proud to be a man

²¹ **Deliberate** (*adjective*): done with intention or on purpose

Paragraphs 50-62

A. Find Evidence: Underline at least two lines where the author has a chance but chooses not to share his background with his friends.

B. Write: Why do you think the author chooses not to reveal his past to his friends?

[66] So they started painting their faces, getting into this idea of war that they knew.

[67] I declined putting the face paint on, and I wanted to give them a hint about my past, but then I thought, You know what? I'm going to have fun with this.

[68] So we went off into the bush, and when one of them shouted, "Yeah, let the war begin! I'm going to bring pain to all of you! I'm going to show you how it's done!" I thought to myself, *First rule of warfare,²² you never belittle²³ your opponent.*

[69] But I didn't say this. I went into the bushes. I already knew where to go, because I had memorized the layout of the place.

[70] And so I would hide. I would wait for them. I would climb a tree here, I would hide under certain shrubs. And they would come rolling around, jumping, doing all kinds of things, things they'd probably seen in movies about how people act in war.

[71] I would just wait for them. And after they were done exhausting themselves, I would come up behind them, and I would shoot the paintball at them.

[72] This went on all day. And when we came back that night, during dinner, they talked about it.

[73] You know: *How come you're so good? You're sure you've never played paintball before?*

[74] I said, "No, I have never played paintball before. I'm just a quick learner, and you guys explained the game to me, and you are really great teachers. This is why I'm able to play so well."

[75] But they said, "That can't be all."

[76] Some of the kids' parents were there, and the kids said to them, "This guy, he comes up on you. You can't even hear him coming at all."

[77] And I said, "Well, you know, I grew up in a village. And I used to be a hunter when I was a boy, so I know how to blend into the forest, like a chameleon. I know how to adapt to my environment."

[78] And they looked at me and said, "You're a very strange fellow, man. But you're *badass* at paintball."

[79] I said, "Well, thank you. Thank you very, very much."

[80] So this went on. We never got to play the group game. We played as individuals all throughout the weekend, because they wanted to beat me, and so they started to team up with each other. I would see them doing this, and then I would come up with a kind of watered-down²⁴ version of another guerrilla tactic,²⁵ just to play with them.

[81] For example, sometimes I would walk backwards and then stand where my footsteps "began" and hide. They would follow my footprints, and then I would come up behind them.

[82] Anyway, at some point I decided that I was going to sit out the game, just so they could enjoy it. And I saw a sense of relief on all of their faces.

[83] They were like, *Oh, well, FINALLY!*

²² Warfare describes the act of being at war.

²³ **Belittle** (*verb*): to talk down or make fun of someone

²⁴ A watered-down version of something is a weak or simple version.

²⁵ A guerilla tactic is a war or fighting strategy.

Paragraphs 66-71

Write: What does the author understand about war that his friends do not?

Paragraphs 72-78

Find Evidence: Underline or highlight two pieces of evidence that reveal the author's dishonesty.

POINT OF VIEW: Paragraphs 71-81

Write: How does this section develop the author's point of view about sharing his background? Have your thoughts changed about why he is not revealing the truth?

[84] When I returned, I told my mother about this game. And my mother, being a mother, was immediately worried.

[85] She said, "Oh, did that bring up something for you?"

[86] And I said, "No, it didn't, absolutely."

[87] Because I know the difference between pretend war and real war.

[88] But it was interesting for me to observe how my friends perceived what war is.

[89] The next day at school, these friends of mine talked about the awesome weekend of paintball we'd had. But they never said how I'd won all the games. And I said nothing at all.

[90] They never invited me back to play paintball with them. And I didn't ask to be invited back.

[91] I so wanted to talk to them about the war while we were playing the game. I wanted to explain certain things, but I felt that if they knew about my background, they would no longer allow me to be a child. They would see me as an adult, and I was worried that they would fear me.

[92] My silence allowed me to experience things, to participate in my childhood, to do things I hadn't been able to do as a child.

[93] It was only years later that they learned why I had won the game.

[94] But I wish I had been able to tell them early on, because I wanted them to understand how lucky they were to have a mother, a father, grandparents, siblings. People who annoyed them by caring about them so much and calling them all the time to make sure they were okay.

[95] I wanted to tell them that they were so lucky to have this naïve innocence²⁶ about the world. I wanted them to understand that it was extremely lucky for them to only play pretend war and never have to do the real thing. And that their naïve innocence about the world was something for which I no longer had the capacity.

POINT OF VIEW: Paragraphs 91-92
Write: What do these paragraphs add to the author's point of view about sharing his background?

Paragraphs 94-95
Write: In your own words, what does the author wish he could have told his friends?

Day 4, Activity 2: Application of Vocabulary

Answer each question in 1-2 **complete sentences**. Make sure that you **use the underlined vocabulary word** in your answer.

1. How do you think students should conduct themselves when working in groups? Explain or describe.

2. What is one thing you do in the morning in a predictable way? Explain.

3. What is one piece of advice you would give a fifth grader about survival in school? Explain why.

Day 5: Text-Dependent Questions

Step 1

Directions: Answer the multiple choice questions below.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. **PART A:** What is the author's point of view about sharing his background? **[RI.6]**
 - A. He believes that sometimes it's fun to pretend to be a different person.
 - B. He believes that a person should always be careful to never share anything with people.
 - C. He believes that in order to live the life he wants, he needs to choose what to share with others.
 - D. He believes that in order to live the life he wants, he should always share his background with everyone.

2. **PART B:** Which of the following quotations from the text best reveals the author's point of view? **[RI.1]**
 - A. "to live with a mother who was willing to take me into her life when most people at the time were afraid of somebody like me" (Paragraph 8)
 - B. "Thus began my two years of high school and making other teenagers confused about who I was." (Paragraph 21)
 - C. "The reason I spoke like this was because of my British-African English that I'd learned, which was the only formal English that I knew." (Paragraph 28)
 - D. "I wanted to explain certain things, but I felt that if they knew about my background, they would no longer allow me to be a child." (Paragraph 91)

3. How does paragraph 74 develop the author's point of view on sharing his background? **[RI.6]**
 - A. It reveals the author's belief that by learning paintball the American way, he can properly fit in.
 - B. It reveals the author's belief that by pretending to not know something, he can still seem like a regular teenager.
 - C. It reveals the author's belief that by learning paintball from the other teenagers, he will make friendships that last a lifetime.
 - D. It reveals the author's belief that by pretending to want to learn paintball, he can try out different personalities to see which one people like the most.

4. In paragraph 92, the author discusses silence. How does the author's silence support his point of view? **[RI.6]**
 - A. It gives him the opportunity to have a normal childhood.
 - B. It gives him the opportunity to learn if a person is safe or unsafe.
 - C. It gives him an opportunity to process the shame he feels about being a child soldier.
 - D. It gives him an opportunity to watch other teenagers and learn how to be an American teenager.



Step 2

Directions: *Respond to the Short Response prompt below.*

SHORT RESPONSE

What is the author’s point of view on sharing his full identity? Support your answer with evidence that shows how the point of view develops throughout the text. **[RI.6]**

HELPFUL RESOURCES

SENTENCE PROMPTS FOR INTRODUCING EVIDENCE:

- In the text, / In the story ...
- In [paragraph X,] ...
- When [X happens] / When [character Y does / says] ...
- The author illustrates this when ...
- For example, ...

SENTENCE PROMPTS FOR EXPLAINING EVIDENCE:

- This means ...
- This illustrates ...
- This reveals ...
- This highlights ...

PARAGRAPH OUTLINE

Claim:

- Evidence
 - Explanation
- Evidence
 - Explanation
- Evidence
 - Explanation