

## Comparing Theme

# The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson

Russian Folk Tale Retold by Leo Tolstoy

# The Wise Old Woman

Japanese Folk Tale Retold by Yoshiko Uchida


## How well do we treat our **ELDERS?**

### COMMON CORE

**RL 2** Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development, including its relationship to the plot and characters; provide a summary of the text. **RL 5** Compare and contrast the structure of two texts and analyze how the structure of each text contributes to its meaning.

Think about all the things the elderly people you know have done in their long lives. They've probably cared for their families, made contributions on the job or in the community, and witnessed events that are now part of history. Do you think they get the respect they deserve from younger generations? The two folk tales you are about to read explore reasons why our elders have earned special treatment.

**LIST IT** Create a list of three to five things that you can do to honor the wisdom and experience of someone from an older generation. Remember that a small gesture can have a big impact.

- 
1. Visit an elderly neighbor
  - 2.
  - 3.

## Meet the Authors

### ● TEXT ANALYSIS: UNIVERSAL THEME

Almost every culture has its **folk tales**, simple stories passed down through generations by word of mouth. Folk tales typically express a **universal theme**, a message about life or human nature that is so fundamental to human existence that it is true for all people of all time periods and cultures.

The two folk tales in this lesson express a similar universal theme. To identify this theme, pay attention to the characters, their actions, and the consequences of their actions.

### ● READING STRATEGY: SET A PURPOSE FOR READING

In this lesson, your **purpose for reading** is to compare two folk tales and to identify the universal theme they share. To do this, as you read take notes in a chart like the one shown. Later on, you will be asked to do more with this chart.

	<i>"The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson"</i>	<i>"The Wise Old Woman"</i>
<i>Who are the important characters, and what are their qualities?</i>	<i>elderly character: unkind characters: other characters:</i>	<i>elderly character: unkind characters: other characters:</i>
<i>How is the elderly character mistreated?</i>		
<i>What motivates characters to stop this mistreatment?</i>		

### ▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

In "The Wise Old Woman," Yoshiko Uchida uses these words to describe a cruel lord and the people who suffer under his rule. Test your knowledge of each word by matching it with the numbered term closest in meaning.

**WORD LIST** arrogant    bewildered    deceive    haughtily

1. proudly    2. superior    3. astonishment    4. mislead



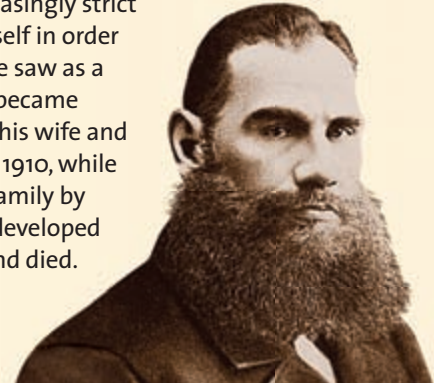
Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

## Leo Tolstoy

1828–1910

### Russian Novelist

Russian writer Leo Tolstoy wanted to produce literature that would help people adopt simple, religious lives. Tolstoy created some of the world's best-known novels, including *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. He also wrote short stories, dramas, essays, and adaptations. As he grew older, Tolstoy imposed increasingly strict rigors on himself in order to live what he saw as a good life. He became isolated from his wife and 13 children. In 1910, while escaping his family by train, Tolstoy developed pneumonia and died. His works live on as literary classics.



## Yoshiko Uchida

1921–1992

### Japanese-American Author

The daughter of Japanese immigrants, Yoshiko Uchida grew up in California feeling different from her white classmates. This difference became more obvious after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, when Uchida and her family were sent to an internment camp. Uchida wrote many books for children that drew on her experience. She said, "I want to dispel the stereotypic image still held by many non-Asians about the Japanese and write about them as real people."



Authors Online



Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com). KEYWORD: HML8-487

# The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson

Retold by Leo Tolstoy

**T**he grandfather had become very old. His legs would not carry him, his eyes could not see, his ears could not hear, and he was toothless. When he ate, bits of food sometimes dropped out of his mouth. His son and his son's wife no longer allowed him to eat with them at the table. He had to eat his meals in the corner near the stove.

One day they gave him his food in a bowl. He tried to move the bowl closer; it fell to the floor and broke. His daughter-in-law scolded him. She told him that he spoiled everything in the house and broke their dishes, and she said that from now on he would get his food in a wooden dish. The old man sighed and said nothing. **A**

A few days later, the old man's son and his wife were sitting in their hut, resting and watching their little boy playing on the floor. They saw him putting together something out of small pieces of wood. His father asked him, "What are you making, Misha?"

The little grandson said, "I'm making a wooden bucket. When you and Mamma get old, I'll feed you out of this wooden dish."

The young peasant and his wife looked at each other and tears filled their eyes. They were ashamed because they had treated the old grandfather so meanly, and from that day they again let the old man eat with them at the table and took better care of him. **B**

## Analyze Visuals ▶

How does color affect the **mood** of this picture?

### **A** UNIVERSAL THEME

How do the man and his wife treat the grandfather?

### **B** UNIVERSAL THEME

What have the man and his wife realized about themselves?

*Beggar and a Boy* (1903), Pablo Picasso. Oil on canvas, 125 cm × 92 cm. Pushkin Museum, Moscow. © Bridgeman Art Library. © 2007 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.





# THE WISE OLD WOMAN



RETOLD BY YOSHIKO UCHIDA

Many long years ago, there lived an **arrogant** and cruel young lord who ruled over a small village in the western hills of Japan.

“I have no use for old people in my village,” he said **haughtily**. “They are neither useful nor able to work for a living. I therefore decree<sup>1</sup> that anyone over seventy-one must be banished<sup>2</sup> from the village and left in the mountains to die.”

“What a dreadful decree! What a cruel and unreasonable lord we have,” the people of the village murmured. But the lord fearfully punished anyone who disobeyed him, and so villagers who turned seventy-one were tearfully carried  
10 into the mountains, never to return.

Gradually there were fewer and fewer old people in the village and soon they disappeared altogether. Then the young lord was pleased.

“What a fine village of young, healthy and hard-working people I have,” he bragged. “Soon it will be the finest village in all of Japan.”

**arrogant** (är'ə-gənt) *adj.*  
displaying a sense of  
self-importance

**haughtily** (hō'tə-lē) *adv.*  
proudly; scornfully

## Analyze Visuals ▶

How would you describe the **setting** shown in this picture?

- ① **UNIVERSAL THEME**  
Why does the young lord decide that old people must be banished?

1. **decree** (dĕ-krē'): to make an order; an order that has the force of law.

2. **banished**: forced to leave a country or a place.





Now there lived in this village a kind young farmer and his aged mother. They were poor, but the farmer was good to his mother, and the two of them lived happily together. However, as the years went by, the mother grew older, and before long she reached the terrible age of seventy-one.

“If only I could somehow **deceive** the cruel lord,” the farmer thought.

20 But there were records in the village books and every one knew that his mother had turned seventy-one.

Each day the son put off telling his mother that he must take her into the mountains to die, but the people of the village began to talk. The farmer knew that if he did not take his mother away soon, the lord would send his soldiers and throw them both into a dark dungeon to die a terrible death.

“Mother—” he would begin, as he tried to tell her what he must do, but he could not go on.

Then one day the mother herself spoke of the lord’s dread decree. “Well, my son,” she said, “the time has come for you to take me to the mountains.

30 We must hurry before the lord sends his soldiers for you.” And she did not seem worried at all that she must go to the mountains to die.

“Forgive me, dear mother, for what I must do,” the farmer said sadly, and the next morning he lifted his mother to his shoulders and set off on the steep path toward the mountains. Up and up he climbed, until the trees clustered close and the path was gone. There was no longer even the sound of birds, and they heard only the soft wail of the wind in the trees. The son walked slowly, for he could not bear to think of leaving his old mother in the mountains. On and on he climbed, not wanting to stop and leave her behind. Soon, he heard his mother breaking off small twigs from the trees

40 that they passed.

“Mother, what are you doing?” he asked.

“Do not worry, my son,” she answered gently. “I am just marking the way so you will not get lost returning to the village.”

The son stopped. “Even now you are thinking of me?” he asked, wonderingly.

The mother nodded. “Of course, my son,” she replied. “You will always be in my thoughts. How could it be otherwise?”

At that, the young farmer could bear it no longer. “Mother, I cannot leave you in the mountains to die all alone,” he said. “We are going home and no matter what the lord does to punish me, I will never desert you again.”

50 So they waited until the sun had set and a lone star crept into the silent sky. Then in the dark shadows of night, the farmer carried his mother down the hill and they returned quietly to their little house. The farmer dug a deep hole in the floor of his kitchen and made a small room where he could hide his mother. From that day, she spent all her time in the secret room and the farmer carried meals to her there. The rest of the time, he was careful to work in the fields and act as though he lived alone. In this way, for almost two years, he kept his mother safely hidden and no one in the village knew that she was there.

**deceive** (dĭ-sēv') v. to cause to believe what is not true; to mislead

### SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION



Japan is a string of several thousand islands off the east coast of the continent of Asia. Much of Japan consists of hills and mountains.

**UNIVERSAL THEME**  
Why does the son decide to disobey the decree even though he might be punished?

### Analyze Visuals ▶

Based on this picture, what can you **conclude** about the journey up the mountain?





*The Moon and the Abandoned Old Woman* (1891), Yoshitoshi. © Asian Art & Archaeology, Inc./Corbis.





*Moon*, Tsukioka Yoshitoshi. From the *Snow, Moon and Flower* Series. © Christie's Images Ltd.

Then one day there was a terrible commotion among the villagers for Lord Higa of the town beyond the hills threatened to conquer their village and make it his own.

60 “Only one thing can spare you,” Lord Higa announced. “Bring me a box containing one thousand ropes of ash and I will spare your village.”

The cruel young lord quickly gathered together all the wise men of his village. “You are men of wisdom,” he said. “Surely you can tell me how to meet Lord Higa’s demands so our village can be spared.”

But the wise men shook their heads. “It is impossible to make even one rope of ash, sire,” they answered. “How can we ever make one thousand?”

70 “Fools!” the lord cried angrily. “What good is your wisdom if you cannot help me now?”

And he posted a notice in the village square offering a great reward of gold to any villager who could help him save their village.

But all the people in the village whispered, “Surely, it is an impossible thing, for ash crumbles at the touch of the finger. How could anyone ever make a rope of ash?” They shook their heads and sighed, “Alas, alas, we must be conquered by yet another cruel lord.”

The young farmer, too, supposed that this must be, and he wondered what would happen to his mother if a new lord even more terrible than their own came to rule over them.

80 When his mother saw the troubled look on his face, she asked, “Why are you so worried, my son?”

### ▲ Analyze Visuals

What **details** about the man’s appearance affect your impression of his personality?

### Language Coach

**Antonyms** Antonyms are words that are opposite in meaning. The word *fools*, which appears in line 69, means the opposite of *wise men*, which appears in line 64. What does the word *fools* mean?

So the farmer told her of the impossible demand made by Lord Higa if the village was to be spared, but his mother did not seem troubled at all. Instead she laughed softly and said, “Why, that is not such an impossible task. All one has to do is soak ordinary rope in salt water and dry it well. When it is burned, it will hold its shape and there is your rope of ash! Tell the villagers to hurry and find one thousand pieces of rope.”

The farmer shook his head in amazement. “Mother, you are wonderfully wise,” he said, and he rushed to tell the young lord what he must do. **E**

90 “You are wiser than all the wise men of the village,” the lord said when he heard the farmer’s solution, and he rewarded him with many pieces of gold. The thousand ropes of ash were quickly made and the village was spared.

In a few days, however, there was another great commotion in the village as Lord Higa sent another threat. This time he sent a log with a small hole that curved and bent seven times through its length, and he demanded that a single piece of silk thread be threaded through the hole. “If you cannot perform this task,” the lord threatened, “I shall come to conquer your village.”

The young lord hurried once more to his wise men, but they all shook their heads in **bewilderment**. “A needle cannot bend its way through such curves,”  
100 they moaned. “Again we are faced with an impossible demand.”

“And again you are stupid fools!” the lord said, stamping his foot impatiently. He then posted a second notice in the village square asking the villagers for their help.

Once more the young farmer hurried with the problem to his mother in her secret room.

“Why, that is not so difficult,” his mother said with a quick smile. “Put some sugar at one end of the hole. Then, tie an ant to a piece of silk thread and put it in at the other end. He will weave his way in and out of the curves to get to the sugar and he will take the silk thread with him.”

110 “Mother, you are remarkable!” the son cried, and he hurried off to the lord with the solution to the second problem.

Once more the lord commended the young farmer and rewarded him with many pieces of gold. “You are a brilliant man and you have saved our village again,” he said gratefully.

But the lord’s troubles were not over even then, for a few days later Lord Higa sent still another demand. “This time you will undoubtedly fail and then I shall conquer your village,” he threatened. “Bring me a drum that sounds without being beaten.”

“But that is not possible,” sighed the people of the village. “How can anyone  
120 make a drum sound without beating it?”

This time the wise men held their heads in their hands and moaned, “It is hopeless. It is hopeless. This time Lord Higa will conquer us all.”

**E UNIVERSAL THEME**  
What do you learn about the old woman from the way she solves the village’s problem?

**bewilderment**  
(bĭ-wĭl’dər-mənt) *n.* the state of being confused or astonished



The young farmer hurried home breathlessly. “Mother, Mother, we must solve another terrible problem or Lord Higa will conquer our village!” And he quickly told his mother about the impossible drum.

His mother, however, smiled and answered, “Why, this is the easiest of them all. Make a drum with sides of paper and put a bumblebee inside. As it tries to escape, it will buzz and beat itself against the paper and you will have a drum that sounds without being beaten.” **F**

130 The young farmer was amazed at his mother’s wisdom. “You are far wiser than any of the wise men of the village,” he said, and he hurried to tell the young lord how to meet Lord Higa’s third demand.


When the lord heard the answer, he was greatly impressed. “Surely a young man like you cannot be wiser than all my wise men,” he said. “Tell me honestly, who has helped you solve all these difficult problems?”

The young farmer could not lie. “My lord,” he began slowly, “for the past two years I have broken the law of the land. I have kept my aged mother hidden beneath the floor of my house, and it is she who solved each of your problems and saved the village from Lord Higa.”

140 He trembled as he spoke, for he feared the lord’s displeasure and rage. Surely now the soldiers would be summoned to throw him into the dark dungeon. But when he glanced fearfully at the lord, he saw that the young ruler was not angry at all. Instead, he was silent and thoughtful, for at last he realized how much wisdom and knowledge old people possess.

“I have been very wrong,” he said finally. “And I must ask the forgiveness of your mother and of all my people. Never again will I demand that the old people of our village be sent to the mountains to die. Rather, they will be treated with the respect and honor they deserve and share with us the wisdom of their years.” **G**

150 And so it was. From that day, the villagers were no longer forced to abandon their parents in the mountains, and the village became once more a happy, cheerful place in which to live. The terrible Lord Higa stopped sending his impossible demands and no longer threatened to conquer them, for he too was impressed. “Even in such a small village there is much wisdom,” he declared, “and its people should be allowed to live in peace.”

And that is exactly what the farmer and his mother and all the people of the village did for all the years thereafter. 

**COMMON CORE** RL 2

**F UNIVERSAL THEME**

Stories can communicate the same universal theme in different ways. For example, the elderly characters in these folk tales don’t share the same qualities. The old grandfather is nearly helpless. The old woman is perceived as solving problems. Why do you think the old woman is able to solve all the problems created by Lord Higa’s demands?

**G UNIVERSAL THEME**

What lesson does the young lord learn?

### Comprehension

1. **Recall** In “The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson,” whose action shames the couple into treating the grandfather better?
2. **Recall** In “The Wise Old Woman,” what is the young lord’s decree?

### Text Analysis

3. **Analyze Motives** In “The Old Grandfather,” why do you think the son and his wife react so negatively to the grandfather’s accident?
4. **Interpret Theme** Summarize the role of the farmer’s mother in this story. In what way does the title of “The Wise Old Woman” reflect the theme of the folktale?
5. **Evaluate Parallel Episodes** In folk tales, events often happen in threes. There may be three wishes or three tasks, for example. These repeated events are called **parallel episodes**. Find the parallel episodes in “The Wise Old Woman.” What do these parallel episodes contribute to the folk tale?

**COMMON CORE**

**RL 2** Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development, including its relationship to the plot and characters; provide a summary of the text. **RL 5** Compare and contrast the structure of two texts and analyze how the structure of each text contributes to its meaning.

### Comparing Universal Theme

6. **Set a Purpose for Reading** Finish filling in your chart. Then add the question about universal theme to your chart and write your answer.

	<i>“The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson”</i>	<i>“The Wise Old Woman”</i>
<i>Who are the important characters, and what are their qualities?</i>	<i>elderly character: unkind characters: other characters:</i>	<i>elderly character: unkind characters: other characters:</i>
<i>How is the elderly character mistreated?</i>		
<i>What motivates characters to stop this mistreatment?</i>		
<i>What is the universal theme?</i>		

### How well do we treat our **ELDERS**?

Do you think our culture treats elderly people well, or poorly? Explain your answer.



# Vocabulary in Context

## ▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the word in each group that is most nearly opposite in meaning to the boldfaced word.

1. **haughtily**: (a) snobbishly, (b) modestly, (c) indifferently
2. **bewilderment**: (a) understanding, (b) confusion, (c) shock
3. **arrogant**: (a) smug, (b) humble, (c) aloof
4. **deceive**: (a) outsmart, (b) scam, (c) guide

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

• comment • community • criteria • perspective • technique

The young lord owes the villagers an apology and an explanation. Give a speech from his **perspective**, explaining what he has learned. Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in the speech.

## VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE SUFFIX *-ly*

A suffix is a word part that can be added to the end of a root or base word. Sometimes a suffix is used to change a word's part of speech. For example, when the suffix *-ly* is added to the end of the word *haughty*, it forms the adverb *haughtily*. When an adjective ends in *-y*, as *haughty* does, the *y* changes to *i* before *-ly* is added.

**PRACTICE** Change each boldfaced adjective to an adverb by adding the suffix *-ly*. Then rephrase each sentence so it makes sense.

1. In the beginning of the story, the young lord was **cruel**.
2. The **tearful** son had to take his mother into the mountains.
3. The **angry** lord asked the villagers for help.
4. The old woman was **happy** to provide her son with the answers.



## COMMON CORE

L2c Spell correctly. L4b Use Latin affixes as clues to the meaning of a word.



# Writing for Assessment

COMMON CORE RL.2.W.2, W.2.a-b, f

## 1. READ THE PROMPT

In writing assessments, you will often be asked to compare and contrast two works that share a similar theme.

The folk tales “The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson” and “The Wise Old Woman” express the same universal theme in different ways. In four to five paragraphs, compare and contrast the ways in which the folk tales convey their message. Support your judgments with references to both texts.

### ◀ STRATEGIES IN ACTION

1. I have to make sure I understand the message expressed by these folk tales.
2. I need to identify the similarities and differences in how the tales get the message across.
3. I should support my ideas using information from the two tales.

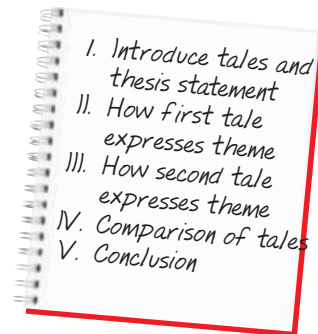
## 2. PLAN YOUR WRITING

Review your chart to identify the universal theme and the way each folk tale expresses it. Then think about how you will set up the body of your response.

- Option A: In one paragraph, describe how the universal theme is conveyed in the first folk tale; in the next paragraph, describe how this theme is conveyed in the second folk tale; in a third paragraph, discuss similarities and differences.
- Option B: In one paragraph, compare the elderly characters; in a second paragraph, compare the mistreatment of the elderly characters; in a third paragraph, compare the motivations for ending the mistreatment.

Once you have decided on the organization, outline your essay.

Then write a thesis statement that describes the main idea of your essay.



## 3. DRAFT YOUR RESPONSE

**Introduction** Give the titles and authors of the tales. Provide a sentence telling what each tale is about. State the universal theme and include your thesis statement.

**Body** Using your outline as a guide, discuss how each folk tale conveys the universal theme. Use details from the tales to support your ideas.

**Conclusion** End each essay by restating the universal theme and your thesis statement. Explain whether the values conveyed by these tales are still important.

**Revision** Make sure you clearly identify the tale you are discussing in each paragraph.