Book report template for 5th grade: theme, evidence and a worked example

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A free 5th grade book report template to print: the form, a five-part outline, a worked example on The Emperor's New Clothes and a shorter review version.

A 5th grade book report adds two things to the summary, the character traits with evidence and the recommendation: the theme, which is the message with the part of the book that shows it, and one choice the author made on purpose. Peabody's 5th grade template prints the form with lines to write on, a five-part outline for writing it as paragraphs, and a worked example on The Emperor's New Clothes, which your child can read free. Like the rest of Peabody it is free through the end of 2026, and it is paper: nothing is typed on the page.

The form

- Box: Title, author, genre and year · The prompt: —
- Box: Summary · The prompt: The whole story, in your own words.
- Box: Character traits · The prompt: Two traits of the main character, with a detail from the book for each.
- Box: Theme · The prompt: The message in one sentence, and the part that shows it.
- Box: The author's choice · The prompt: One thing the author did on purpose: a repeated line, a surprise, who tells it.
- Box: Recommendation · The prompt: Who should read it, and why?

Six boxes, fewer than in 4th grade, but each one asks for more. The summary box has no sentence limit, which tempts a child to write down everything; it is worth agreeing on five or six sentences before they start.

Theme is the hard box

The tip on the template page is the best single line on theme I know: the theme is a sentence about people, not about this story. Not "the Emperor is tricked", but "it takes courage to say what is true".

A child who writes the first kind of sentence has written a summary. Ask: "What would this story teach someone who has never met an emperor?" The answer is usually the theme. Then comes the second half of the box, the part that shows it: one moment from the book, not the whole plot again.

The author's choice

This box is new in 5th grade, and it is the first real step towards analysis. The prompt gives three places to look:

- A repeated line. Something said more than once, which means the author wanted it noticed.
- A surprise. A twist the author set up on purpose.
- Who tells it. Whose eyes the story is seen through, and what would change if someone else told it.

A child only needs one. "The author made ___ happen because ___" is a fine way to start the sentence.

A worked example

The example on the page is on The Emperor's New Clothes, which a grown-up can read here to check the answers. Four of the six boxes, as they are on the page:

Title, author, genre and year:

The Emperor's New Clothes by Hans Christian Andersen, a fairy tale first published in Copenhagen in 1837, retold by Peabody.

Character traits:

Vain: the Emperor loves new clothes more than anything. Afraid of looking foolish: he pretends to see cloth that is not there rather than say so.

Theme:

It takes courage to say what is true. The child shows it by saying out loud what everyone else is only thinking.

The author's choice:

Andersen makes a small child the only one who tells the truth, so all the grown-ups look sillier than the child.

Each trait has its evidence after the colon, the theme is about people rather than this one emperor, and the author's choice says what the choice does, not only what it is.

The outline, as paragraphs

1. Introduction: title, author, genre, year.
2. Summary.
3. Character traits with evidence.
4. Theme and the author's choice.
5. Recommendation.

The review version

For a book read for fun, the same page has a shorter review: a rating and one word for the book, the best thing about it, one thing your child would change if they were the author, and "read this if you like…". It still asks for an opinion, without the theme and the evidence.

A book at the right level

On Peabody's ladder, 5th grade is level 10. That page lists the free stories at level 10 in the library, such as Anansi and the Sky God and Beauty and the Beast, and the kids' lists that fit, such as the top 25 books for a 5th grader. Levels are measured from each story's own text, never from a child, so use them as a place to start.

Other grades

Before: 4th grade, which asks what the character wants and why the setting matters. After: 6th grade, which is built on a thesis. All ten templates are on the book reports page, and the guide to book reports by grade sets them side by side.

Questions parents ask

What is the difference between a theme and a lesson?

On Peabody's 2nd grade template the lesson box starts "The lesson is…", and in a fable the lesson is often said in the story itself. A 5th grade theme is usually not said anywhere: the child has to name it and point to the part that shows it. The pointing is what this grade is practising.

How long should a 5th grade book report be?

As long as the form: six boxes by hand, or five short paragraphs as prose. The theme and the author's choice deserve more lines than the summary does.

Does the book have to be a novel?

No. A short classic like this one is a good place to practise theme, because the whole story is fresh in mind when the writing starts. If the teacher asks for a longer book for the final report, the template works the same way.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/book-report-template-5th-grade