

Name: _____ Teacher: _____ School: _____

Grade 7: Lesson 20 Analyze how a theme develops in “His Motto” through setting, characters, plot, and point of view.

Note catcher:

<u>Point of View</u>	
<u>Character</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Durmont	
African American boy	

“His Motto”
By Lottie Burrell Dixon

Part II

They had entered the one-room shack which contained a long table holding a wireless outfit, a couple of chairs and a shelf of books. On the walls were tacked pictures of aviators and drawings of aeroplanes. A three-foot model of a biplane hung in a corner.

"Now if he is only in," said the boy, going over to the table and giving the call.

"He's there," he said eagerly, holding out his hand for the message.

Durmont handed it to him. His face still held the look of doubt and unbelief as he looked at the crude, home-made instruments.

"Suppose I might as well have hired a horse and taken it into town." But the sputtering wire drowned his voice.

"And get on your wheel and go like blazes. Tell 'em to rush answer. This guy here thinks a colored boy is only an animated shoe-blackening outfit; it's up to us to remedy that defect in his education, see!" Thus sang the wires as Durmont paced the floor.

"I said," began the nervous man as the wires became quiet. "I—" again the wire sputtered, and he couldn't hear himself talk. When it was quiet, he tried again, but as soon as he began to grumble, the wire began to sputter. He glanced suspiciously at the boy, but the latter was earnestly watching his instruments.

"Say," shouted Durmont, "does that thing have to keep up that confounded racket all the time?"

"I had to give him some instructions, you know, and also keep in adjustment."

"Well, I'll get out of adjustment myself if that keeps up.

"Durmont resigned himself to silence, and strangely enough, so did the wire. Walking around the room he noticed over the shelf of books a large white sheet on which was printed in gilt letters:

"I WILL STUDY AND MAKE READY, AND MAYBE MY CHANCE WILL COME."

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

Durmont read this, and then looked at the boy as if seeing him for the first time. Again he looked at the words, and far beyond them he saw his own struggling boyhood, climbing daily Life's slippery path, trying to find some hold by which to pull himself up. And as he watched the brown-skinned boy bending over the instruments, instinct told him here was one who would find it still harder to fight his way up, because of caste.

"Ah!"

The exclamation startled him. The boy with phones adjusted was busily writing.

"Well, has that partner of yours got that message down at his end yet?"

"Yes, sir, and here is your answer from New York."

"Why it's only been half an hour since I wrote it," said Durmont.

"Yes, that horse wouldn't have got into town yet," grinned the boy.

Durmont snatched the paper, read it, and threw his cap in the air, exclaiming, "The day is saved. Boy, you're a winner. How much?" putting his hand in his pocket suggestively.

"How much you owe to my help, I don't know," answered the lad sagely. "I offered to help you because you needed it, and I was glad of the chance to prove what I believed I could do. I'm satisfied because I succeeded."

Durmont sat down heavily on the other chair; his nerves couldn't stand much more in one afternoon. To find himself threatened with a large financial loss; to have this averted by the help of the scientific knowledge of a colored boy, and that boy rating the fact of his success higher than any pecuniary compensation—he had to pull himself together a bit.

His eyes fell on the motto on the wall. He read it thoughtfully, considered how hard the boy had worked because of that, his hopes of the future based on that; saw the human element in him as it had not appealed to him before, and then turning something over in his mind, muttered to himself, "It's nobody's business if I do."

"He got up, and walking over to the boy said: "What's your name?"

"Robert Hilton."

"Well, Robert, that motto you've got up there is a pretty good one to tie to. You certainly have studied; you have made yourself ready as far as your resources will permit, and I'll be hanged if I don't stand for the 'chance.' In the manufacturing of electrical instruments you could have great opportunity for inventive talent, and in my concern you shall have your chance, and go as far as your efficiency will carry you. What do you say, would you care for it?"

"I'd care for it more than any other thing on earth, and am very grateful for the chance."

"The chance wouldn't be standing here now if you had not had the inclination and the determination to live up to those words on the wall."

Source: Dixon, Lottie Burell. "His Motto." *The Upward Path*. Ed. Myron T. Pritchard and Mary White Covington. Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920. Project Gutenberg. Web. Public domain.

Independent Practice:

What is a theme (message to the reader) of the story "His Motto?" How do the characters' actions and points of view develop this theme?

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