Task Prompt: After reading a text, study and consider the themes presented by the author throughout the text. After making inferences about what the author wanted readers to understand, determine how the author reveals a theme through character development. Then, determine a relationship between theme and character development to create an arguable claim about the theme. Use textual evidence to support the claim(s) as you construct a literary essay.

Christina Lattimore’s Struggle with Innocence

In *The Kidnapping of Christina Lattimore* by Joan Nixon, Christina Lattimore is denied money from her grandmother to go on a huge school trip to France; she is really upset with her family. So, one night she goes to her friend’s house to listen to music and relax. She told her friend that she hated how her family wouldn’t let her go on the trip. Everything was going fine and she headed home because her parents wanted her home but when she was heading home from her friend, Lorna’s house, she got kidnapped! And I know you may be thinking that this is just another one of those classic kidnapping stories but it isn’t. The kidnappers hold Christina hostage and make up a lie, framing Christina and saying that this was her plan and she left home willingly! They made it appear that Christina would only come back if her grandmother handed over a ridiculous amount of money that was seemingly a way to pay for the trip to France. Eventually she is rescued but nobody believes her story that she really was kidnapped! So, throughout the book, Christina needs to prove her innocence by using things like critical thinking, perseverance, and personal drive.

Christina Lattimore was given an easy life up until the kidnapping. She went to a private school, she had a wealthy family, she never really had any real concerns, until the kidnapping. In the beginning of the book, Christina is faced with multiple problems that cause her to have to stay on her feet and get through what arose from the kidnapping. It all started with the thing she saw when she came home from eating out, “The door is unlocked, and there is a small piece of that invisible cellophane tape over the side, to keep the lock from
closing. Why? Who would put it there?" (Nixon 22). This is the start of all her suspicion. Christina feels very concerned and searches for answers. She even asks her housekeeper if she'd seen anything but she hadn't. I] causes her to have raised suspicions which makes her think critically. Shortly after, she finds out why the tape was there. When Christina is going home, she is surrounded by people that she has to kick and scream to get away from. This creates a string of events that will later be needed very much and Christina knows that so she knows she has to remember everything. Also, by kicking and screaming, she is showing that she thinks critically. "There is a thin wedding band on his left hand and a large bandage on his middle finger. So his was the hand I bit. Good!" (Nixon 58). This is a clear example of how she is using her resources and is pulled out of her easy, no-problem life and she is faced with a tough situation in which she has to critically think.

As time goes on, Christina is starting to learn that she was never really was put in a difficult situation before the kidnapping and this is one of the few times that she really had to persist through. In the middle of the book, Christina has to piece together evidence to prove her innocence. For example, Christina goes to the Tigus house to get answers out of Loretta Tigus is one of the kidnappers and that house is where Christina was held. Christina has obviously thought and thought about this and she uses this as a tactic because she knows that Loretta is the weak link in the kidnapping operation. This shows that even though Christina hasn’t been put in many tough situations, she didn’t just give up and leave it as it is but she still searched and searched for answers. Another example of her showing perseverance and really trying to prove that she is not an extortionist is this. When the police come to the Tigus house to make arrests, and they ask Christina to provide evidence, even though nobody believed her, she still gave as much evidence as possible to prove that she didn’t
do anything. Even though Christina doesn’t even want to be there and she can’t figure out why she’s accused she is still able to provide the information to help the police. She knows that her evidence won’t be very effective but she still knows that if she keeps providing evidence that something will come of it. “We want to get things down on paper. It sometimes helps. It’s easier to get them into perspective. At least, it always works that way for me” (Nixon 208). Although this isn’t Christina speaking, but “Detective” Kelly, it is still a great way of showing her using perseverance. This is because she went and sought help from Kelly because he was the only one that believed her. They got together and began to gather information to prove to everyone, especially the people she loved most, that she wasn’t an extortionist.

By now, Christina has pieced all the information together and uses it to prove to everyone that she is innocent. In the end of the book, she just needs to get everything figured out to ensure that she can bring the true criminals to justice. To get to the point of busting the criminals she has to get the final information. Christina tells everyone that she saw Della's son’s apartment when Zack went into it and his name was on the mailbox. This is something she found when she planned to meet up with Zack. She knows that she needs to do whatever it takes to prove herself or else she will have to live with the burden the rest of her life. Most importantly, she wants all of her family and friends to know so they don't have to be phased by the extortion crime of her daughter against her grandmother. "'Bring Loretta inside,' I shout and run into the house" (Nixon 298). Here is the "wrapping up" point of the investigation. She has put all the evidence together, she has brought one of the criminals to the police, and she soon wins her family back. They all wanted to believe her and they finally had a good reason to. Christina had accomplished her goal and confirmed to everyone that she was innocent. This relates to my claim because the book is about Christina having to come back from a framing and show that she is the innocent
one. Nobody believed her. Everyone thought that she just wanted her grandmother's money. She was thought of as a criminal. She changed all that. Because she used skills like critical thinking and perseverance, she proved her innocence. All of this came from believing in herself.

Christina needed to prove to everyone that she was innocent and she did through doing many things. When she was kidnapped, she realized how good her whole life was and how much she loved her family. Once she was accused of extortion, she knew she had to prove that she was innocent. She wanted to prove to her family that she wasn't lying and she had to do whatever she could to do just that. The author made Christina use skills such as perseverance and thinking critically to do just that. In the end, even though the book is about her proving her innocence, she realized that she was important and no matter what people think, she should always try prove herself. She knew that she shouldn't just settle for what people falsely think about her but what is true.
This is an example of an advanced 8th grade literary essay. This writer methodically developed and revised his argument working from planning sheets to drafting to this final copy. Throughout writing he made decisions about which chronological events were most important to proving his claim. As an advanced piece of writing, you’ll see that the writer wove key works like innocence, justice, and perseverance to continually remind the reader of his claim.