

Character Building

How are creative, effective, and believable characters created for the stage?

Grades 9-12 Lesson: Character Building

Grade Band: 9-12

Arts Subject: Theater

Other Subject: English & Literature

SUMMARY

In this 9-12 lesson, students analyze popular characters and methods of characterization used by writers. Students will apply these methods to create a profile and illustration of an original character. They will write a short script demonstrating two or more characters interacting while mirroring their unique characterizations.

PREPARATION

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Explore characterization methods used by writers.
- Analyze the unique characteristics of fictional characters, friends, and family.
- Develop a character profile.
- Create a character drawing.
- Understand ways a newly developed character mirrors attitudes, values, fashion, manners, and from a certain period.
- Write a scene with multiple characters interacting and demonstrating their unique characterizations.
- Perform a short scene for an audience.

Standards Alignment

National Core Arts Standards

[TH:Cr1.1.II.c](#) Use personal experiences and knowledge to develop a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work.

[TH:Pr4.1.II.a](#) Discover how unique choices shape believable and sustainable drama/ theatre work.

Common Core State Standards

[ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3](#) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

[ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3](#) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Recommended Student Materials



Editable Documents: *Before sharing these resources with students, you must first save them to your Google account by opening them, and selecting “Make a copy” from the File menu. Check out [Sharing Tips](#) or [Instructional Benefits](#) when implementing Google Docs and Google Slides with students.*

- [Start Building a Character Profile](#)

Websites

- [Characterization](#)

Videos

- [Find Your Character Voice with Alan Bomar Jones](#)
- [Storytellers Toolbox: Character Voices and Sound Effects with Sherry](#)

Teacher Background

Teachers should review the resources and videos prior to introducing the lesson. [Creating Fictional Characters](#) is a recommended prerequisite for examining characters and understanding methods of characterization.

Student Prerequisites

Students should have general knowledge of characterization. Students should be familiar with short plays and writing short scripts.

Accessibility Notes

Modify handouts as needed and allow extra time for task completion. Utilize assistive technologies to support students during the writing process.

INSTRUCTION

Engage

1. Generate a class list of fictional characters students resonate with from books they’ve read. For example, Fred and George Weasley, Sethe Suggs, Charlie Kelmeckis, Lisbeth Salander, Daunis Fontaine, Onyesonwu, Tom Sawyer, Esperanza Cordero, Sidney Carton, Jane Eyre, and Frodo Baggins.

2. Introduce the concept of [characterization](#) with a few of the examples given. Tell students certain fictional characters have a unique ability to resonate with readers.

3. Have students discuss memorable characters and devices used to create them. Ask: *How do writers create such enduring characters? Through what devices do they create the mystique of these singular personalities? What are some methods writers can use to build characterization?*

4. Share the Teaching Artists Present videos, [Find Your Character Voice with Alan Bomar Jones](#) and/or [Storytellers Toolbox: Character Voices and Sound Effects with Sherry Norfolk](#). Watch the videos and discuss the methods used by the teaching artists when they create dynamic and distinctive voices for characters.

5. Divide students into collaborative groups to brainstorm two of their favorite characters from a book, play, or movie. Students will list the specific reasons why they designated the characters as “favorites,” such as how the writer uniquely developed each of the characters. Have students consider ways the writer makes the characters come to life, including:

- Physical characteristics
- Interaction with other characters
- Interaction with their environment
- Internal thoughts and/or philosophical outlook
- Revelations about their past
- Dialect or way of speaking

Build

1. Brainstorm a profile based on a friend or relative. Give the person a pseudonym (a fictitious name). On scratch paper, have students describe the subject from a range of perspectives to capture as full a description as possible for the reader.

2. Initiate an open discussion of recurring patterns of characterization observed in the students’ favorite characters and/or techniques used in students’ descriptions of a friend or relative. Students can make comparisons with a graphic organizer or ask for volunteers to share “profile” responses.

3. Distribute the organizer, [Start Building a Character Profile](#). Continue to build upon the profile to create a well-defined persona. The character should exhibit realistic characteristics, not superhuman or cartoonish characteristics. Each character description should include most or all of the following elements:

4. Allow time for students to develop a well-rounded profile. Students can draw on literature, plays, movies, experiences, re-watch [Find Your Character Voice with Alan Bomar Jones](#) and [Storytellers Toolbox: Character Voices and Sound Effects with Sherry Norfolk](#) to deepen the character description.

5. Create a character sketch. The illustrations should align with the characteristics in the profile.

Apply



1. Set-up a “character’s” gallery for students to explore each other’s characters. Students should share the background information they have constructed in developing the characterization.

2. Group 2-3 characters together and write a scene where they all interact. Have students choose one of the following situations as a centerpiece for developing a brief script for a scene at:

- School
- The park
- A social situation, such as a dance, an evening at a friend’s house, or a trip to the theater or concert
- An unexpected meeting on the street
- An airport
- In a neighborhood

Advise students that, in developing their scripts, they should give careful attention to sustaining such aspects as the personality, behavioral traits, language use, and attitudes of the characters as earlier defined.

3. Allow time for students to write and rehearse their scene. Students should pay close attention to sustaining, in the dramatic projection, the integrity of the original personality, including the general outlook, language use, and behavioral profile of the character.

4. Gather and place props to frame a scene. Follow the reading or performance with a peer critique. The scene and props should relate to the setting.

Reflect

1. Perform a scene for an audience. Have students perform the scene in front of the class.

2. Evaluate students’ knowledge of characterization by observing aspects of the characters personality, behavioral traits, language use, and attitudes.

3. Reflect on the creation of a character, script-making, and performance experience. Ask students: *How did you maintain the integrity of the characters? How did context, language use, body language, facial expressions, and behavioral attitudes differ from one character to another?*

Credits

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