

Grade 7: Unit 2 Entry Level Task: Characterization

Essential Question: How do authors create fictional characters that feel alive?

Suggested Pacing: 2 days

Background: In fifth and sixth grade, students have participated in book clubs and analyzed novels for common story elements such as character, setting, and conflicts. They also practiced identifying the traits of characters and supporting their ideas with evidence. In this unit, students will deepen that knowledge by focusing on techniques authors use to make their characters feel alive. They will read complex texts that feature multilayered characters and analyze how authors use different writing strategies to make these characters relatable, funny, surprising, etc.



Task: Students will write a 55 word story revealing something about themselves that people might not know and share their work on a Padlet.

Purpose: The purpose of this task is for students to consider what makes humans complex and understand how this relates to literary characters. Humans have different thoughts, traits, desires, conflicts, and motivations that combine to create unique personalities. This type of complexity is reflected in the characters in novels, and analyzing the different layers of a character’s personality can help us to better understand the themes and ideas in a story.

Getting Started:

The teacher will begin the lesson by asking students to consider the following question: *What makes you who you are?* Give them a few moments to think independently and jot down their ideas on a sheet of paper. After students have had time to think, allow them to discuss their thoughts in small groups. While students are discussing their ideas, the teacher should circulate and offer suggestions to any groups that are struggling with the question. For example, students could think about their physical appearance, values, traits, likes and dislikes, hobbies, life experiences, etc.

After students have had time to discuss the question, the teacher should ask for volunteers to share their ideas with the class. As students respond, the teacher should create an anchor chart listing general aspects of identity. Once the conversation ends, the teacher will point out that humans are complex beings made up of many different elements. Authors create complex, realistic characters by including the same elements in their writing. This process is called *characterization*.

Making Meaning:

Next, the teacher will explain that we will practice looking at different elements of a character using the short film “Siblings.”

First Viewing: Instruct students to identify character traits for the older sister character, along with evidence to support their thinking. There are no spoken words in this film, so remind students to analyze the character’s actions to determine these traits. After the first viewing is complete, ask students to discuss their thoughts with a partner, and then with the whole class. Students will likely come up with traits such as sad, lonely, mean, regretful, caring, etc.



Second Viewing: Play the film a second time, but this time, instruct students to look deeper into the traits of the older sister. Why is she sad? Why is she mean? Why does she respond to her brother the way she does? After the second viewing, discuss what her information students thought about.

This time, students should be considering ideas such as:

- She is sad because of family problems - she sees happy families outside and on TV and her family is not happy.
- She is mean and forceful with her brother because she sees this behavior modeled by her parents at home.
- She becomes more caring because she realizes that she doesn't want to hurt her brother the way her parents hurt each other.

Explain that by including these elements, the author is bringing complexity to this character. She is not simply a mean person - there are reasons behind her actions and feelings. By providing these details, the author is making the character come to life.

Investigation:

Next, students will continue to practice analyzing details that add complexity to characters. In this [activity](#), students will be given quotes from different short stories, without reading the story. Students will be asked to determine six character traits that they believe apply to this character based on the quotes. Then, they will describe what they think the character will be like, and how other characters may react to this character.

Teachers can use their discretion in assigning the different pieces of the activity. For example, teachers can choose to assign one set of quotes per group, jigsaw the activity, etc.

Create and Produce: 55 Word Story

After practicing analyzing details about fictional characters, students will return to reflecting about themselves and their own complexity. To show their own layers, students will compose a 55 word story revealing something about themselves that people most likely do not know about them. To make it easier to keep track of their word count, it is recommended to have students type their response in a Google Doc and use the Tools→ Word Count function. Students can also choose to include a personal picture or an online image to illustrate their story.



Here is an example:

I'm exactly what most people peg me as upon first sight. Quiet. Bookish. Studious. What people don't guess is where I am every Monday and Friday night. Parked in front of the TV watching professional wrestling. I disappear into a world of ridiculous drama and flashy violence. What can I say? I love a spectacle.

Teachers are encouraged to create their own 55 word story to use as an example with their class.

Communicate and Present:

Students will post their story and image on a padlet. Students will view each other's stories on the Padlet and leave hearts or comments.

[Teachers can view instructions for using Padlet on this document.](#)

Reflection:

Respond to the following questions in your readers notebook:

- Did you learn anything new about yourself or others through these activities?
- What makes you complex?
- How did the “Siblings” film, quotes activity, and 55 word story help you to develop or deepen your understanding of complex characters in books?

Link to curriculum formatted task