

Grade 7: Unit 2 Topic 1 - Investigating Characterization

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

Suggested Pacing: 50-60 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 design and create a digital yearbook featuring several characters from their book club novel. Students will be responsible for writing both short and elaborated written responses describing characters and their development across their text, organizing graphical elements in a logical and attractive way, making logical, evidence-based inferences, and demonstrating a deep understanding of the techniques their author used to bring depth and complexity to their characters.

Purpose: The purpose of this task is to give students a creative opportunity to explore many aspects of characterization and demonstrate their understanding of how authors develop a character across a text.

Getting Started:

Students will first be introduced to the [image at the right](#). Students will reflect in their notebooks on the following questions:

- What do you think the characters are thinking in this picture? How do you know?
- What do you predict might happen next? Why?

After students have reflected in their reader notebooks they will turn and talk and share out responses.



Teacher will follow up with questions:

- What evidence from the picture did you base your inferences on?
- What choices did the artist make that helped you figure out your answers?

After the teacher has led a discussion surrounding these follow up questions, the teacher will introduce the following information:

“Authors convey information about their characters in three main ways:

- *Their thoughts*
- *Their words*
- *Their actions*

This process is called characterization, and it’s how we get to know the characters in a story.”

Making Meaning:

The teacher will use a [clip of Ursula](#) from “The Little Mermaid” to practice investigating characterization. As students view the clip, they will annotate in their notebook. Students will write about how the thoughts, words, and actions of the

character combine to tell us something about her. The teacher will direct students to also focus on the following questions as they view the clip:

- What are the conflicts you notice?
- What word or words would you use to describe this character?
- What is the difference between the words the character speaks to Ariel and her true character? How do you know?



Once students are done viewing the clip, the teacher will have students partner up in groups of 2-3. Students will share in their small groups some of their annotations from their readers notebooks. They should share what thoughts, words, and actions characterized Ursula. The teacher will then ask groups to share their responses and have a short whole group discussion.

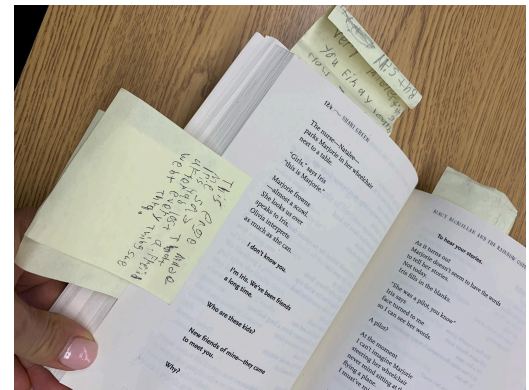
Investigation:

Students will select a novel of their choice and work in book clubs. Throughout their reading, the teacher will use selections from the mentor text [“Sometimes A Dream Needs a Push” by Walter Dean Myers](#) and will lead mini-lessons on the following topics:

- Character motivations
- Character perspectives
- Figurative Language
- Point of view
- Conflict
- Theme

Books available in this unit:

- *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander
- *The Thing About Jellyfish* by Ali Benjamin
- *The Benefits of Being an Octopus* by Ann Braden
- *Popular Clone* by M.E. Castle
- *Efrén Divided* by Ernesto Cisneros
- *New Kid* by Jerry Craft
- *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman
- *Invisible* by Christina Diaz Gonzalez
- *The Sky at Our Feet* by Nadia Hashimi
- *The Other Boy* by M. G. Hennessey
- *Ophie’s Ghosts* by Justina Ireland
- *When You Trap a Tiger* by Tae Keller
- *The Unteachables* by Gordan Korman
- *Coo* by Kaela Noel
- *Ghost* by Jason Reynolds
- *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes
- *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie* by Jordan Sonnenblick
- *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead
- *Forget Me Not* by Ellie Terry
- *The Bridge Home* by Padma Venkatraman



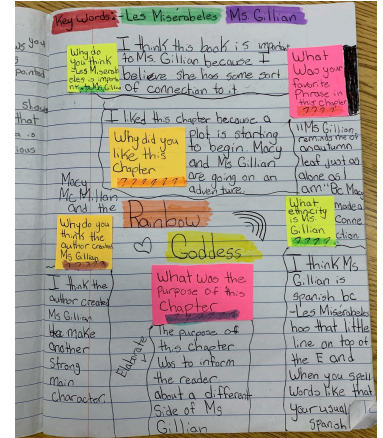
As they read, students will take notes and collect evidence in their notebooks on each of the mini-lesson topics. These notes will help them create their character yearbook in the next stage of the task.

During book club reading, the teacher should engage with three main tasks:

1. Joining book clubs briefly for the purpose of listening to conversation, asking questions, and assessing the needs of students as readers.
2. Conduct reading conferences with students for the purpose of understanding where they are as readers and delivering instruction in reading strategies to strengthen their skills.
3. Conducting reading journal conferences with students to review their journals, the evidence they pull out, and their thoughts and ideas about the reading for the purpose of assessing their ability to critically think and analyze while reading.

Please refer to [this guide](#) so that conferences and meetings with students are conducted in a uniform way across classrooms and schools for an assured experience for students and teachers.

For book clubs, the selections above should be introduced by the teacher. Students are able to choose their own book for the following activity. Based on students' selections, the teacher will form groups. Students will keep needed information in their **reader's notebooks** based on their book club selection. Students should also use sticky notes to annotate their text, placing sticky notes in their journal based on the level of importance and how they want to discuss those notes. For notes that they want to discuss at length, they should move into the reading journal so that students can discuss them in writing. **See the picture above** for an example.



During book clubs: **(RCCM.1) (RCCM.3) (COM.1) (COM.2)**

Students will have time to read with peers, the teacher, and with streaming audio, as available.

- Teachers will meet with one or two book clubs per day (depending on what reading conferences may be planned) for discussion and written response in reader's notebooks. Students should be asked to perform a variety of tasks in their reader's notebooks. Some examples include the following, but not limited to:
 - Quote analysis (e.g., what did a character say or what did the author write that paused you to think or make connections?) **(RCCM.1)**
 - Word analysis (e.g., pick a word that was particularly effective in creating an image for you) **(COM.1) (COM.2) (RCCM.3)**
 - Character analysis (e.g., a choice the character made, a behavior from the character, a feeling or need expressed by the character) **(RCCM.1) (RCCM.2)**
 - Point of view: Who is telling the story? Is it a narrator we can't see? (3rd person) Is it one of the characters? (1st person) How does this point of view affect how we understand a story? **(RCCM.2)**
 - Symbols, similes, metaphors: What has the author included in the story that helps us to infer character motives, make predictions, identify theme, etc. **(LL.2)**

Create and Produce:

After reading their book club selection, students will create a digital yearbook analyzing at least four characters from their novel. Their finished response should include:

- A yearbook cover page
- A characterization page with an extended written response analyzing how their author developed their protagonist across the novel
- Four character pages describing the traits and giving additional information about their characters (images, quotes, "about me" section, etc.)

- A theme page describing how a theme develops across their novel

After students have designed their yearbook, they will work one to one with a classmate to revise and edit. During their revision time, students will give feedback to ensure that the project includes each element outlined in the [success criteria](#). Students will share their finished work with one another. Students will read the response and take note/provide feedback of the writing mechanics and content during the revision time. Students will make edits directly as recommended by their peers before they communicate and present their final piece.

Communicate and Present:

Students will present their projects to each other in small groups. The groups should be composed of students that read different novels. As students listen to each other read their work, they can share feedback about similarities and differences to the characters, themes, and conflicts that they noticed in their own novels.

Students can use these [feedback stems for yearbook projects](#) as they engage in their feedback session. Encourage students to incorporate more of their own feedback as well.

Reflection:

Students will reflect in their notebooks on the following questions:

- How did my author create characters that felt alive?
- How did creating my project help me to understand my characters better?
- What feedback do you think has impacted your project? How so?

[Link to curriculum formatted task](#)