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“Capturing a Character”: A unit for teaching 2nd-grade students how to understand literary characters

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Unit: “Capturing a Character”: A unit for teaching 2nd-grade students how to understand literary characters (10-12 Days)

Grade: 2nd-grade

Stage 1: Desired Results

Understandings

Students will understand that

- *Your own character is defined by how you act and what you say. (Note: You will need to help students understand that character means a person in a fiction story, but it also is an abstract idea meaning one’s entire personality.)*
- *You can learn about the character of others by observing them.*
- *A person can be described by multiple traits and feelings, both of which can change or evolve over time.*

Essential Questions

- *How will others perceive me?*
- *How can I learn about another person’s character and what motivates them?*
- *How can I describe another person’s character?*
How can a person change over time?

Knowledge

Students will know...

- *Character traits are consistent over time and describe someone’s personality.*
- *Feelings are transient and describe a person’s emotional state.*
- *Motivations are the reasons behind why a character takes action.*
- *A person can be described by multiple traits and feelings.*
- *Character traits can be shown through a person’s actions, words, and feelings.*

Skills

Students will be able to...

- *Describe main characters in works of fiction including their traits, motivations, and feelings (TEKS, ELA & Reading 2.9b)*
- *Make inferences about text and use textual evidence to support understanding. (TEKS, ELA & Reading Fig 19D)*

Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

Performance Task:

Students will choose a character trait to represent by completing an open-ended comic strip. Students will complete their comic strip by adding words, thoughts, and illustrations that reflect the chosen character trait. In addition, students will identify their character trait and how it motivates their character’s behaviors through a brief written response.

Write character trait choices (generous, helpful, goofy, unkind, selfish, aggressive) up on the board and tell students they will be choosing ONE trait from the list on the board to represent in their comic.

Other evidence:

- *Informal observations of ongoing student notes in Reading/ELA notebooks throughout the unit*
- *Informal observations during class discussions*
- *Feelings and Images worksheet (day 2)*
- *Character “Traits and Actions” worksheet (day 3)*
- *Character traits graphic organizer (on self) (day 4)*
- *Motivations Passages (day 5)*
- *Character Traits and finding Evidence (day 7)*
- *Character Creation group project (day 8-9)*
- *Character Creation Guessing Game (individual student worksheet, Plickers or Kahoot data) (Day 10)*
- *Performance Task (Day 11)*

Stage 3: Learning Activities

(Steps taken to get students to answer Stage 1 questions and complete performance task)

Note: Please be aware that these lessons are intended for whole group delivery and should not take the place of guided reading. To strengthen your students’ understanding, continue to practice determining character traits, motivations, and feelings in your guided groups with the use of the provided graphic organizer.

Day 1 Introduction to Character traits- FEELINGS

- Read Lao Tzu quote. Ask students what they think this means. Discuss. Inform students that we’ll talk more about the quote later at the end of the unit.
- Tell ss. we will be learning about characters this week- and how to get to know more about them. Share the learning objective of this unit: We will discover the three ways we can learn more about a character. Reveal each way as we teach it (Feelings, Character Traits, and Motivations).
- Engage ss. in the question of how we learn about characters in a story. Discuss- if ss. do not generate the idea of FEELINGS- bring up that we can learn about a character by looking at how they FEEL. Discuss feelings and define as a character’s mood or emotional response. Discuss how feelings change depending on the situation you are in.
- Create an anchor chart (leaving space for the other two areas of character study. Use only about a third of your chart).
- Reading mentor text: What do you do with a problem? by Kobi Yamada. Tell ss. to be thinking about what we can learn about how the character feels in the story. Brainstorm how the character felt during the story and list some of the feelings on the anchor chart. Also invite ss. to think about other feelings characters have had in previous read alouds.
- Before ss. go to reading stations they should create their own version of today’s anchor chart. Leave open on desks to allow teacher to check in for understanding (informal observation).

Guided reading recommendations: Read a story- stop to identify character feelings in various situations. Discuss how we can observe/figure out characters feelings while reading a story (words, images, settings, what we know/inferences).

Day 2 Revisit Feelings

- Begin by reviewing one way learn about characters: by looking at their feelings.
- Tell students we are going to talk about our own feelings as we are often similar to characters in a story with how our feelings change in different situations. We will also be creating a feeling word bank.

- Complete feeling survey ([POWTOON video-https://www.powtoon.com/m/geBoAZT3LTy/1/m](https://www.powtoon.com/m/geBoAZT3LTy/1/m)) - may need to pause for discussion!) with students. As ss. share feeling responses/reactions T. should record feelings on word bank.
- Before going to reading stations ss. should complete the “Feelings and Images” worksheet. Model a few together first. Ss. are creating images that match each feeling word.

Guided reading recommendations: Read a story- stop to identify character feelings in various situations. Discuss how we can observe/figure out characters feelings while reading a story (words, images, settings, what we know/inferences)

Day 3- Character Traits

- Review what we have already learned- one way we can learn about characters is by examining their feelings- how they react to different situations. Review ss. “Feelings and Images” work from yesterday/feelings vocabulary.
- Tell ss. today we are going to discuss character traits- this means words that describe our PERSONALITY. Not just in one moment, but in general or over time how we act.
- Add to anchor with space for character traits word bank.
- Re-tell “What to do with a Problem” and discuss character traits of the boy in the book as we read- record in character trait word bank.
- Discuss HOW we can determine someone’s character traits- we look at what they say and what they do or how they act (locate some evidence in the story) and add any additional traits to our word bank.
- Begin “Character traits and actions” worksheet together- ss. can finish with a partner before going to reading stations.

Guided reading recommendations: Use the character traits graphic organizer while reading a story. Stop to identify characters words/actions and to determine what character traits these show.

Day 4- Character Traits

- Gather students and review character traits (what is a character trait and what are some examples).
- Tell ss. again we are going to look at ourselves as character today. Today is a great day to really explain how the student has “character” which is in this sense doesn’t mean a person in a story but how they show their overall personality and values (If your school has a character building program this would be a good thing to reference, such as “Pillars of Character,” etc.)
- Introduce the character traits graphic organizer. Tell ss. together we are going to fill this out for a character in our read aloud today and then afterward they are going to think about how they might fill one out for themselves!
- Read aloud “Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon” and complete the graphic organizer as a guided practice (choose one character to use). Discuss how the graphic organizer would be different for other characters in the story.
- Afterward ss. should complete the graphic organizer for themselves as a character. Model this first.

Guided reading recommendations: Use the character traits graphic organizer while reading a story. Stop to identify characters words/actions and to determine what character traits these show.

Day 5- Motivations

- Review what we have already learned- one way we can learn about characters is by examining their feelings- how they react in different situations- and another way is by looking at their Character Traits. Today we are going to look at the last way we can learn about a character: their motivations. List this on the anchor chart.
- Show POWTOON skit (<https://www.powtoon.com/m/dsASa87QJGy/1/m>)- This child has a very dirty room. They have toys out and the bed's not made! The child really wants to get on their parent's tablet. Mom/Dad tells them they must clean their room first. What is the child's reason for cleaning their room?
- Introduce the idea that MOTIVATION means we are looking at WHY someone does something.
- Try it out with an example passage- read the short story and identify the characters motivation. WHY did the character act the way they did? how do you know?
- Ss. should try one on their own as well.

Day 6- How to find evidence- to determine traits

- Tell ss. today we are going to be using COMICS to help us learn about characters.
- Discuss what comics are and what comics students enjoy reading or have seen. Model how to read a comic, moving from left to right and top to bottom along the page.
- Review with students what character traits ARE- and how we can figure out what character traits best describe a person? [we can look at their actions/what they do, what they say, how they feel, their motivations, etc.]
- Show ss. the comic from "The Sisters" by Cazenove & William on p. 7 (note: entire book may not be appropriate for a 2nd-grade classroom library, please evaluate the graphic novel you decide to use. For the purpose of these lessons, we are only using excerpts from this selection whole group with the students. You may feel free to choose any comic you wish that can illustrate a character trait. Focus on looking for the illustrations showing the actions, and thought bubbles or words showing feelings. A good resource for graphic novels can be found at http://www.ala.org/offices/resources/its_elementary_graphic_novels)
- Read it together and complete the graphic organizer (Day 6-7 "Character Traits and Finding Evidence") as a guided practice. We will identify the TRAIT shown by the little sister AND what EVIDENCE helped us to figure it out.

Trait: Dishonest

Evidence: The little sister says "A girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do" as she reaches her arm up to try to steal the toy after her claw drops it.

Day 7- How to find evidence- to determine traits

- Review our discussion yesterday about how we determine character traits by using evidence. Also review what evidence can consist of.
- Show ss. a second comic from "The Sisters" by Cazenove & William on p. 54

- Read it together and complete the graphic organizer (Day 6-7 “Character Traits and Finding Evidence”) as a guided practice. We will identify the TRAIT shown by the little sister AND what EVIDENCE helped us to figure it out.

Trait: Goofy/playful/funny

Evidence: The little sister keeps playing tricks, she is laughing a lot and smiling, and says “April Fools!”

- Give ss. another comic to try on their own (p. 68 from “The Sisters” by Cazenove & William). They will again determine a character trait for a given character, and identify evidence that helped them to determine the character trait.

Trait: Rude, mean

Evidence: The little sister purposely kicks the ball at the goal keeps face and then laughs

Day 8- Group Project (See “Group Character Creation Task”)

- Student groups will be assigned a “secret” character trait.
- Each group will be responsible for creating a character that shows their assigned trait by generating the character’s thoughts, words, and actions, as well as identifying their feelings or current emotional state.
- Show teacher model (1 is provided for each format) and allow students to guess the character trait being represented. Also ask them which part helped them most in determining the trait. *Answer key:* model #1 (grumpy), model #2 (caring)
- Ss. will have time today and tomorrow to create their characters

Day 9- Group Project (See “Group Character Creation Task”)

- Continue creating characters

Day 10- Telling traits Quiz (Use “Day 10 Character creation guessing game student sheet”)

- Ss. will share their characters by telling their thoughts, words, feelings, and actions. The rest of the class will determine the appropriate character trait.

Day 11- Final Assessment: Performance Task- Close with Lao Tzu

*If needed, build in another day for Finding Evidence or Group Project lessons

Credits and Resources:

- Cazenove & William (2008). *The Sisters: Just like family*. Charnay-lès-Mâcon, France: Bamboo Édition.
- Lovell, P. (2001). *Stand tall, Molly Lou Mellon*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Yamada, K. (2016). *What do you do with a problem?* Seattle, WA: Compendium, Inc.
- http://www.ala.org/offices/resources/its_elementary_graphic_novels- American Library Association's resource website for great graphic novel titles intended for elementary students.
- <https://flic.kr/p/8sfJrC>- for imagery used under the Lao Tzu quote. The quote was added to the original image.
- Kahoot.com- Create interactive games for students to play. Questions are posted on a projector and students choose their answers on their own devices or computers. Students will need their own tools and rounds are timed, though you can edit time between questions when you create your quiz game. Data is uploaded live for you to view and download. Accounts are free.
- Plickers.com- Formative assessment tool for teachers to use with students. Students do not need technology, but the teacher will need a smart device to scan student responses. Data will be uploaded live to the screen to facilitate instant discussion. Accounts are free.
- PowToon.com- Create animated videos with this simple online program. Free accounts are available as well as premium accounts to give you access to more features.

Our mentor texts are suggestions that can always be replaced with other texts. The graphic organizers that were created can be edited by you to suit your needs.