

**Unit 2: Character Analysis:
Spotlight on Making Connections and Synthesizing (3 weeks)**

Rationale

Why is this unit important and appropriate for this grade level and at this time of the year?

During this unit, students will think deeply about characters, develop empathy for them, and live inside the world of the story. Students begin the unit by developing a relationship with a character. They then shift focus as they approach texts as researchers developing evidence-based theories about the characters. By the end of the unit, they should be able to shift between these stances, balancing the advantages of getting lost in the text while taking an analytical stance.

Learning Outcomes

What do we expect students to know and be able to do at the end of the unit?

Students will:

- Integrate the strategies of visualizing and synthesizing to grow theories about characters
- Gather specific evidence from text(s) to support theories/claims about characters
- Be active participants in strategic reading partnerships to deepen comprehension through conversation
- Focus talk on one or two ideas that are central to the text and provocative enough to merit conversation

Minilessons/Notes/Tips

What minilessons will lead to student learning outcomes?

Possible Minilessons:

- Putting yourself in the shoes of characters
 - Personality quirks and habits
 - Likes and dislikes
 - Fears
 - Hopes and dreams
- Linking the text to our lives by making meaningful connections
- Recognizing the difference between connections that deepen comprehension and those that distract (possibly using a T-chart)
- Making connections to characters through personal experiences to deepen understanding and develop empathy
 - Thinking about whether or not the reader would want to be friends with the character
- Developing empathy for character(s)
 - Seeing through the characters' eyes
 - Predicting his or her next steps
- Revising our image of the characters as we read on and gather new information
- Thinking deeply about characters by paying close attention to their
 - Feelings
 - Actions
 - Thoughts
 - Relationships/interactions with others
- Identifying the internal and external traits of characters
- Empathizing with characters to make strong predictions
- Seeing characters through the eyes of others
 - How do others view the character?
 - How do others treat the character?

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- What do others call the character?
- What are you noticing about the voice and body language others use when talking to the character?
- Developing mental images
 - What do the places in the book look like?
 - What have you seen before that can help you picture the character and setting?
- Noticing what a character does and how they do those things (e.g., If the text says the boy slumps in the chair, is he tired? Bored? What is going on?)
- Noticing how characters talk
 - The words they choose
 - Their tone of voice
 - How they act while they are talking
- Noticing inconsistencies in characters, times when they do not act like themselves
 - Keeping track of a character by recording a timeline
 - Asking questions about what the character does, says, thinks and understanding that some questions may go unanswered while others can be inferred
- Stepping out of a character's shoes to grow big ideas about the character
- Taking a step back to notice how a character acts/responds to events and using this information to develop theories about the character
- Modeling how to develop ideas by talking and writing about them
 - Demonstrating how to take an idea (e.g., stop and jot Post-it) and write longer about it as a way to develop an idea and cite evidence of thinking
- Revising theories about characters as we read on and gather new information
 - Using evidence to support thinking as ideas are revised and/or new ideas developed
 - Examples of evidence include what the character does, thinks, says, etc.
- Choosing precise words to describe characters to accurately speak about their inner nature
- Retelling to summarize information
- Distinguishing between a summary of the text and the reader's thinking
- Creating a set of expectations for partner work by reviewing what students know about effective reading partnerships
 - What does a strong reading partnerships look like? Sound like? Feel like? (Create anchor chart)
- Creating a "Questions Partners Ask Each Other" anchor chart
 - What kind of person is the character?
 - Do you like him or her? Why or why not?
 - Why did the character do, say, think that?
 - How come the character is feeling that way?
 - Do you think he or she did the right thing?
 - What do you think will happen next?
- Creating a "Ways to Sustain Partner Talk" anchor chart
 - What in the text makes you say that?
 - I thought that too, because...
 - Another example of that is...
 - I agree because...
 - Wait. I'm confused. Are you saying...
 - Have you found the same thing with the character in your story?
 - Can you say more about that?
 - Can you show me the part of the story where you got that idea?
- Celebrating the end of the unit. Possibilities may include but are not limited to the following:
 - Show a video or audiotape of a partnership talking about books. Have students identify what the partnership is doing successfully. Chart responses.
 - Have partnerships discuss what their strengths are and identify a goal for their partnership work by asking themselves, What do we do well? What are some areas we could work on getting better at?
 - Distribute a bookmark of talk moves for partnerships to support student conversations about books read.
 - Have students complete a character study reflection. (What strategies did you find helpful as studied about characters in the texts you read? How did those strategies help you as a reader? How has your thinking about characters in texts changed? How can you apply what you have learned about reading fiction to all of your reading? Be as specific as possible.)

Notes/Tips:

- **Students should continue to build stamina by reading independently for a minimum of 35 minutes.** (To view strategies for building stamina click go to the archived artifacts on the district units of study website. To access the units of study website use the link http://ww3.mamkschools.org/units_of_study/. From the top nav bar, select Grade 4 Reading, select “Resources” and click on the unit folder.)
- During read aloud and shared reading expose students to texts that range in genre (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, etc.)
- Meet with guided reading groups consistently as a way to differentiate reading instruction for all students.
- Consider reading level, behavior and interest when forming partnerships.
- Teachers must confer with reading partnerships to support students in engaging in conversations that will push their thinking and deepen their comprehension about texts read.
- Students reading Level O should be reading 2-3 books per week, Level P should be reading 2 (long) or 4 (short) books per week, Level Q and R should be reading 1 book per week. (See Allington research referenced in Unit 1 professional resources.)
- Whole class conversations are imperative to helping students understand what partner conversations should sound like. After reading aloud a chapter, ask, “Can someone get us started in a conversation about this chapter?” Teach readers that great book talk begins with ideas that are central to the text and provocative enough to merit conversation. Talk should be centered around one or two ideas with evidence from the text to support student thinking.
- Choose read alouds and mentor texts for this unit that promote strong female and male characters. Be sure to choose texts that appeal to both genders. Suggested texts include the following: *There’s a Boy in the Girl’s Bathroom* by Louis Sachar, *The Tiger Rising* by Kate DiCamillo, *Maniac Magee* and *Loser* by Jerry Spinelli. Picture books with strong characters are also highly recommended. Picture book authors suggested include Kevin Henkes, Patricia Polacco and Eve Bunting.
- Have students choose fiction, character rich texts. Some teachers create baskets of books with strong characters, share the books via book talks and then place the baskets in the class library.
- Students might benefit from acting out parts of a story to help develop empathy for characters and deepen their mental images.
- Students should be turning and talking frequently during the interactive read aloud to provide a scaffold for reading partner conversations.
- Another way to support reading partnerships is to have partners sit next to one another during read aloud so they have daily opportunities to turn and talk and teacher support as needed. Having students turn and talk frequently provides a scaffold for the work students will do with their reading partners.
- As part of the reading workshop share carefully select one or more reading partnerships (e.g., fishbowl) to demonstrate a rich book conversation. Have students name out the effective moves and habits of the partnership.
- Students might benefit from vocabulary work (e.g., adjectives, synonyms) during this unit as a way to support their thinking and conversations about characters.
- During this unit, continue to set structures in your classroom to build reading partnerships, such as providing prompts to children to begin, add onto conversation and question one another. This should be modeled for students and charted as a reference for independent time. This will promote rich text based conversations that will deepen students’ understanding of the text.
- Some of the comprehension strategy lessons can be done during read alouds and shared reading allowing for more time during reading workshop for work on establishing partnerships and working on character lessons.
- To view recommended genre specific texts for read aloud and independent reading use the following link <http://readingandwritingproject.com/resources/classroom-libraries.html>.
- **To view Grade 4 archived artifacts for the unit please visit the Grade 4 reading/writing page. Select “Resources” from the top nav bar. To access the units of study website use the link http://ww3.mamkschools.org/units_of_study/.**
- Additional resources of sample anchor charts for reading and writing units of study include the following: <http://readingandwritingproject.com/resources/classroom-charts/third-eighth-grade.html>.

Professional Resources

What professional resources will be helpful in planning the unit?

- *The Common Core Lesson Book K-5* by Gretchen Owocki
- *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project 4th Grade Reading Curriculum Calendar 2010-2011*
- *Strategies That Work* by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis
- *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* by Lucy Calkins and Kathleen Tolan (*Following Characters into Meaning, Volume 1 and Volume 2*)
- *Words, Words, Words: Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4-12* by Janet Allen
- *Fourth Grade Readers: Units of Study to Help* by Martha Heller-Winokur and Marcia Uretsky (Chapter 2)
- *Comprehension through Conversation* by Maria Nichols
- *Talking About Text: Guiding Students to Increase Comprehension Through Purposeful Talk* by Maria Nichols
- *Teaching for Comprehension and Fluency* by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell
- *The Next Step in Guided Reading: Focused Assessments and Targeted Lessons for Helping Every Student Become a Better Reader* by Jan Richardson