

Lesson 5 A Question of Character

Aim:

How can we create characters that are real and unique?

Do Now:

Prewriting: (preferably in journals!)

Describe something that you always have in your pockets or purse. Why is the item important to you? What does it say about you that you always need to have this item with you?

1. Students respond to the Do-Now, writing for three to five minutes. As students write, you can write “Character” on the board as a heading.

2. Have a few students share their responses. You can take notes on their responses on the board; you might try taking notes in two columns, one for the item and one for what the item shows about the “character.” You could also add a third column for what it shows about the “character” that he/she needs to have the item within reach.

3. Use your notes as a segue into the activity, explaining that all the tiny details that make up each one of us help to create our “characters.” In creating a fictional character, a writer might use details observed in one person or many people; or the writer might make up details to create this person. Either way, a character is believable because of specific details about his/her looks and thoughts and behavior. Once you have a well-imagined character, you’re ready to write a story. In fact, some might say, if you know beyond doubt with whom you’re dealing, the characters will write the story for you.

4. Distribute the handout, “It’s a Question of Character.” Ask students to answer all the questions on it. (You can also write the questions on the board and ask the students to respond in their journals.) Tell them that the style of their writing is not important at this point, just the details they choose. You might want to circulate to target students who are having trouble getting started or to validate the work that students are doing.

5. Ask some students to share their character descriptions. You might want to add some of their ideas to your board notes, or ask other students to point out the most interesting choices they heard.

6. If you have time, have students begin work on a short story in class. If not, you can ask them to start for homework.

You might want to write some tips for starting on the board—

- Open your story with a description of your character.
- Open your story by describing your character doing something.
- Open your story with a dialogue between your character and another person — either someone he/she knows or a stranger.
- Open your story in the first-person, using voice of your character.

7. Again, if you have time, have some of your students share their beginnings. Discuss how the character traits informed the opening of the story.

Extensions

- Students continue working on their pieces, completing a rough draft, offering it for peer review and then completing a final draft. Celebrate final pieces with a reading and/or student publication.
- Students can study the use of character in published short stories (or novels). You could also look at some examples of the opening ideas described above.
- Students can pick a character from a short story, novel, play or poem that you are studying in class. They can fill out the questionnaire using this character, creating new details where the story doesn’t answer them — or they can design questions of their own to use. They can then create a monologue or short story centered on this character.

Name of Writer:

A Question of Character - Handout

Use this sheet to create a character. You can use a character based on someone you know, someone you've seen but don't know, a composite of several people — or even yourself. Just be sure to pick very specific details to answer the questions.

1. What does this person look like? _____

2. How old is he/she? _____

3. What does this person do? (Student? Grandmother? Artist? Race-car driver?) _____

4. What does this person always have with him/her? (in pockets, purse or backpack?) _____

5. What is his/her favorite thing to do? _____

6. Where does this person live and with whom? _____

7. What would this person do after learning he/she had six months to live?
Start smoking again? Stop flossing? Quit the job? _____

8. What is this person most afraid of? _____

9. What is his/her favorite time of year? _____

10. What does this person really love? _____

11. What does he/she really hate? _____

12. What is this person's name? _____

