Unit 1 - Interpreting Characters: The Heart of a Story

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s): **English Language Arts**
Time Period: **Marking Period 1**
Length: **5-6 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Unit Overview

In this unit, students will think deeply about their characters and learn essential skills such as making inferences, building theories, and learning life lessons by "walking in the shoes" of their characters. At first they will learn to live as a character and later they will step out of that character's shoes and reflect and grow big ideas about that character. In order to help students develop their skills at predicting, envisioning, and reading with fluency we will first teach students to "wear the shoes of the characters and inhabit the world of the book." Next, students will be encouraged to think deeply about their character's personality quirks and habits, by considering what a character holds close, the character's complexities, and the way the secondary characters act as mirrors of main characters. In addition, they will learn to infer and develop ideas about character's traits, motivations, troubles, changes, and lessons. The third portion of this unit will shift children from inferring about characters to interpreting characters and growing theories about them. The goal for this portion of the unit is have children's theories build in complexity. Finally, readers will think between books, comparing and contrasting characters who play similar roles across several books.

In this unit, you'll help students delve into complex texts and see significance in details. They'll go beyond simple character traits to study the complexity of characters, seeing complications and flaws, and they'll build on their ideas about characters in order to also explore the themes those characters advance. They'll trace a theme through different parts of the story, and grow skills such as inference and interpretation. Setting their own goals, they'll learn that with deliberate, goal-driven effort, they can form interpretations supported across a whole text and find meaning in recurring images, objects, and details. You will teach them to draw on their knowledge of fictional genres to read actively and intensely from the start. For a mystery, they'll try to collect clues so they solve it. For a fantasy, they'll expect to learn about a quest. Whatever the genre, this unit will help your students become more alert to even non-sequential story structures.

Standards

LA.RL.4.1	Refer to details and examples in a text and make relevant connections when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
LA.RL.4.2	Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.
LA.RL.4.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in literature.
LA.RL.4.10	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems at grade level text-complexity or above, with scaffolding as needed.
LA.RI.4.3	Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.
LA.RI.4.5	Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect,

	problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.
LA.RI.4.6	Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.
LA.RI.4.7	Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.
LA.RI.4.8	Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text.
LA.RI.4.9	Integrate and reflect on (e.g., practical knowledge, historical/cultural context, and background knowledge) information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.
LA.RF.4.3	Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding and encoding words.
LA.RF.4.3.A	Use combined knowledge of all letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns, and morphology (e.g., roots and affixes) to read accurately unfamiliar multisyllabic words in context and out of context.
LA.RF.4.4	Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
LA.RF.4.4.A	Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.
LA.RF.4.4.B	Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression.
LA.RF.4.4.C	Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

Essential Questions

- How do readers walk in a character's shoes?
- How do readers build theories about characters?
- How do readers grow theories about characters?
- How do readers compare and contrast characters across books?

Application of Knowledge: Students will know that...

- readers build theories about characters by thinking about a character's personality quirks, habits, and considering what their characters hold close.
- readers build theories by noticing the way the secondary characters act as mirrors of the main character.
- readers build theories of complexity by thinking between books, and noticing characters who play similar roles across several books, and think about the ways those characters are similar and different.
- readers envision through every means possible, by asking what do the places in a book look like? What's going on around the character?
- readers grow theories about characters by inferring and developing ideas about characters' traits, motivations, troubles, changes, and lessons.
- readers walk in a character's shoes by predicting, envisioning and reading with fluency.

Application of Skills: Students will be able to...

- develop ideas about characters' traits, motivations, troubles, changes, and lessons learned.
- develop their skills in predicting and envisioning.
- interpret characters and grow theories about characters.
- make inferences and build theories about characters.
- work in partnerships to enhance understanding of their books and further develop comprehension skills.

Teaching Points and Suggested Activities

The following teaching points are adapted from the Interpreting Characters*; The Heart of the Story* unit; *Grade 4;* part of the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* by Lucy Calkins and Colleagues from the Reading and Writing Project. These serve as a loose framework for teachers, who will add and or emphasize based on their students' needs.

Teaching Points

- teach students that people read intensely to grow solid ideas that are grounded in the text.
- teach students that readers need to choose books that are calibrated at the upper end of what they can read with understanding.
- guide students through an inquiry to explore how readers create procedures and systems to find books they want to read.
- teach children that in addition to retelling chronologically, readers can do a synthesis retelling by retelling only the part of the book they've just read.
- teach students that readers use the power of their minds' eye to put themselves into the world of their books as they read.
- teach children that readers who aim to improve a skill can use learning progressions to set goals and assess their progress.
- teach students that people read characters and develop theories about them in much the same way that people read each other.
- teach children that readers pay special attention to details that reveal characters' desires, the obstacles they encounter, and their struggles to overcome them, to best understand both characters and the story.
- teach children that readers grow significant ideas about a character by noticing what the author calls to their attentions.
- teach students that readers' ideas about characters can become more precise, insightful, and sophisticated when readers reach for exact, precise, true language that captures those ideas.
- teach students that readers recognize that characters are complex and may seem one way in some relationships or settings, and another way in a different context.
- teach students that readers can debate differing viewpoints on a provocative question about a book they have both read.
- teach children that strong readers defend and critique ideas by quoting specific words, sentences, and passages from the text that provide evidence for their ideas.
- teach children that readers consider more than character when trying to interpret or make meaning of a story, and you'll introduce a few lenses through which they might look to grow their understanding of a text.
- teach children that readers who read interpretively pay attention to parts that stick out.

- teach children that readers push themselves to have deeper thoughts and build interpretations about a story by looking across their cumulative thinking, finding patterns, and making connections.
- teach children that when readers develop a central interpretation of a book, they consider big life issues that relate to many people and stories, choose one that pertains to that particular book, and then figure out what the book is saying about that issue.
- teach children that paying attention to recurring images, objects, and details helps readers develop complex interpretations about stories.

Activities to Support Teaching Points

- create and refer to anchor charts
- study pages from exemplar reader's notebooks
- provide and present mentor texts as models
- teach the *Work of Readers* Charts
- teach children strategies for holding onto text, for example by using Post-its and graphic organizers
- model (Talk Aloud) the strategies good readers use
- model, provide, and use a reader's notebook
- tap, sketch, or jot across a story as a way of retaining information and details
- study book introductions and endings
- practice creating mental movies as you read
- investigate figurative language and descriptive vocabulary and how authors use them
- Turn and Talk the dialogue in a story to bring the characters' feelings alive
- set mini-reading goals for engagement, print work, fluency, comprehension, and/or conversation
- provide checklists and reading progressions to assess and develop on-going reading goals
- scaffold skills with strategies, for example using Post-its to identify key elements of a chapter
- write long about reading
- practice alternating the speed a text is read to reflect tone and mood
- plan to celebrate the conclusion of classroom reading projects
- use technology in the reading classroom; for example digital journals

Assessments

Assessment in this unit takes three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. The resource *Reading Pathways, Grades 3-5*, provides reading progressions, performance assessments, rubrics, tools for collecting data, a system for conducting running records, There are also downloadable, digital versions of the assessment tools available through the online resources at; www.readingandwritingproject.org/resources. Teachers may also develop their own rubrics and assessments in order to include more specific elements of knowledge and skills listed in this unit summary.

Student self-assessment and peer assessment should take place whenever possible--again, in all three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Removing the traditional emphasis on teacher assessment enables students to take more initiative and become self-directed.

On-going teacher assessment will take place in the context of a conference. Conferences, both small group and one-to-one conferring, are used to reinforce expectations, provide advice and/or assistance, and ultimately, to support growth.

Diagnostic Assessments

Running Records

www.readingandwritingproject.org/resources/assessments/running-records

Spelling Inventory

www.readingandwritingproject.org/resources/assessments/spelling-assessments

Individual beginning of the year "How's It Going?" conferences

Formative Assessments

Teacher-student conferences including: individual, small group, strategy group, and guided reading

Daily observation of students' participation during the active engagement segment of each mini-lesson.

Students' conversation with partners during Turn and Talk segment of mini-lessons.

Reading logs, Reader's Notebooks, Writing About Reading evidence (Post-its, journal entries, writing long about reading, for example)

Summative Assessment

Teacher-student conferences

Running Records

Spelling Assessments

Reading logs, Reader's Notebooks, and other evidence of students improving skills

Activities to Differentiate Instruction

The design of reading workshop allows for individualized instruction and independent growth for every child. At the heart of differentiation in Reader's Workshop is data and the analysis of data. Through the usage of monitoring student progress during independent reading, analysis of formal and informal running records, and other assessments such as high-frequency word lists and spelling inventories, teachers should be able to delineate which students are in need of additional supports, in what areas those supports should be targeted at, and which students are ready to be pushed further in their reading work.

Some methods to use to support struggling readers as well as advanced readers:

- Provide leveled books appropriate for all reading levels
- Provide support as needed through conferencing
- Provide support as needed through strategy groups
- Provide support as needed through guided reading groups
- Provide modified and/or alternate grade level checklists and rubrics to scaffold or stretch learning
- Scaffold or stretch learning through the use of various strategies
- Provide appropriate reading partners
- Utilize charts to provide a visual reminder for students throughout the mini-lesson.
    - Add drawings and visuals to charts
    - Provide individualized copies of teaching charts
    - Depending on the concept, the chart may be most effective to visually break the concept into parts and touch each part during a demonstration
- For students needing more support at the end of the mini-lesson, keep them at the rug for an extra minute after dispersing the rest of the class and clarify the main topic of the mini-lesson or work one-on-one with them to start their reading
- Set reading goals for students and follow-up with the reading goals after an appropriate amount of time.
- Create group and one-on-one conferencing calendars to ensure that students are being met with on a regular basis and working toward individualized goals
- As the unit progresses, the teacher, in coordination with the students, will develop a word wall that will highlight vocabulary specific to the topic chosen
- Assign roles to partners (Partner 1/Partner 2) to help scaffold which student should speak first and avoid one partner dominating the conversation and the other partner becoming a passive listener
    - For ELL students, creating a triad instead of partnership may be beneficial
- Provide students access to RAZ Kids which will provide students more reading options for leveled texts, access to technology, and the ability to have books read to them while they follow along or for students to record their reading

Supports for ELL students:

- Provide consistent teaching structures
- Use consistent teaching language
- Offer plentiful opportunities for reading practice
- Provide access to a broad variety of texts
- Use assessment to provide extra support
- Support students in the preproduction and early production stages of learning English
- Use visual examples in your teaching
- Modify our mini-lessons to be as concise as possible
- Provide extra ?active engagement? time in mini-lessons for extra practice
- Provide readers with topic-based text sets
- Provide opportunities for listening and learning the social language of the reading workshop
- Provide opportunities to read in both their home language and in English
- Plan instruction with the ELL teacher
- Extend the language ELLs are producing through questioning
- Provide explicit instruction in tenses, pronoun references, and connectives
- Support students in building vocabulary using their own reading as the context
- As the unit progresses, the teacher, in coordination with the students, will develop a word wall that will highlight vocabulary specific to the topic chosen

In order to support this differentiation work, teachers may want to consult the following materials:

- Units of Study books at lower or higher levels for teaching strategies that are appropriate to the support needed.
- The Reading Strategies Book by Jennifer Serravallo
- If. . . Then. .. Curriculum book for alternate units or teaching points to support the individual reading levels.
- A Guide to the Reading Workshop (Primary Grades) chapter 14 for more in-depth information on differentiation

Challenge gifted students to incorporate more complex reading techniques based on the 5th grade Reading Learning Progressions:

- base predictions on what the readers knows about the genre of fictional texts and predict not just what will happen to the main character, but also to the secondary characters across multiple plot lines.
- realize that in more complicated stories, the reader sometimes has to wait longer for the parts to fit together or for things to become more clear, At these points, the reader may reread to figure out how the parts of the story fit together, but also read on with questions in mind.
- alert that stories are not always told sequentially; note back story, gaps in time between scenes,

flashback and flash-forward, and subplots.
- name a theme and then summarize the most important parts of the story that support that theme.
- see places in a story where the characters are not what they seem at first.

Integrated/Cross-Disciplinary Instruction

Writing Workshop

- apply language and ideas from read alouds and independent reading
- utilize read alouds and independent reading as mentor texts
- apply spelling strategies
- identify areas of spelling needs
- apply grammar skills
- identify areas in need of addressing (spelling, grammar, mechanics)
- expand written vocabulary from read alouds and independent reading
- model sentence and paragraph structure after mentor texts

Content Areas: Science, Social Studies, Health

- read just right books in the content areas
- use mentor texts to deliver Social Studies content
- compare content area ideas and issues to what our characters deal with in our read alouds and mentor texts
- apply reading skills and strategies to the reading we do in the content areas

Study Skills

- use graphic organizers to support reading
- use checklists and rubrics to monitor progress
- use Venn diagrams and t-charts to gather, compare, and contrast events
- use highlighters, note cards, post-its, and other tools to keep track of story events, details, and ideas
- keep a log and notebook

The Arts

- analyze illustrations in books for details
- compare illustrations to other forms of art
- illustrate a passage that was just read to show details, ideas, and lessons
- act out a scene from a book to better visualize how a character feels

Suggested Mentor Texts and Other Resources

Mentor Texts

- Dancing in the Wings, Allen, Debbie
- Freedom Summer, Wiles, Deborah
- Number The Stars, Lowry, Lois
- Stone Fox, Gardiner, John Reynolds
- The Tiger Rising, DiCamillo, Kate

Resources

Units of Study for Teaching Reading:

- *Building a Reading Life* by Lucy Calkins and Kathleen Tolan
- *A Guide to the Reading Workshop, Intermediate Grades*; Lucy Calkins
- *Reading Pathways, Grades 3-5, Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions*; Lucy Calkins
- *If...Then... Curriculum: Assessment-Based Instruction, Grades 3-5*; Lucy Calkins; Julia Mooney; and Colleagues From the TCRWP
- *Online Resources for Teaching Writing*; Lucy Calkins
- website: www.readingandwritingproject.org/resources

The Art of Teaching Reading; Lucy Calkins

The Reading Strategies Book: Your Everything Guide to Developing Skilled Readers; Jennifer Serravallo

Leveled Books, K-8: Matching Texts to Readers for Effective Teaching; Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

Reading Miscue Inventory: From Evaluation to Instruction; Yetta M. Goodman

Miscue Analysis Made Easy: Building on Student Strengths; Sandra Wilde

Around the Reading Workshop in 180 Days; Frank Serafini

The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child; Donalyn Miller

Mindsets and Moves: Strategies That Help Readers Take Charge; Gravity Goldberg

Guiding Readers and Writers, Grades 3-6; Irene C Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

Smarter Charts; Marjorie Martinelli

21st Century Skills

CRP.K-12.CRP2.1	Career-ready individuals readily access and use the knowledge and skills acquired through experience and education to be more productive. They make connections between abstract concepts with real-world applications, and they make correct insights about when it is appropriate to apply the use of an academic skill in a workplace situation.
CRP.K-12.CRP4.1	Career-ready individuals communicate thoughts, ideas, and action plans with clarity,

	whether using written, verbal, and/or visual methods. They communicate in the workplace with clarity and purpose to make maximum use of their own and others' time. They are excellent writers; they master conventions, word choice, and organization, and use effective tone and presentation skills to articulate ideas. They are skilled at interacting with others; they are active listeners and speak clearly and with purpose. Career-ready individuals think about the audience for their communication and prepare accordingly to ensure the desired outcome.
CRP.K-12.CRP12.1	Career-ready individuals positively contribute to every team, whether formal or informal. They apply an awareness of cultural difference to avoid barriers to productive and positive interaction. They find ways to increase the engagement and contribution of all team members. They plan and facilitate effective team meetings.