



Title: Understanding and Relating to Characters: *Truth About Me, Character Mapping, and Character Museum*

Grade Levels: 4 - 8

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Description: In this lesson, students will engage multiple ensemble-based, embodied learning strategies to explore character. Additionally, this lesson makes use of collaborative techniques that ask students to work together to analyze and compare/contrast characters. This lesson can be used with any play, poem, story, or selection of text.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will identify character traits and provide facts about characters from the play.
- Student will identify commonalities and difference between themselves and a character, and between different characters in the play.
- Students will spatially map out/define how the characters are connected in the play through creating a visual map.
- Students will create statues that embody a specific character and read the images/analyze choices within statues that others created.

SEL Competencies Taught:

Self-awareness, which is the ability to recognize one's emotions and know one's strengths and limitations

Social awareness, which is the ability to take the perspective of others, demonstrate empathy, acknowledge and appreciate similarities and differences, and understand how one's actions influence and are influenced by others

2014 National Core Theatre Standards:

TH:Cr1.1.4.c. Imagine how a character might move to support the story and given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Pr4.1.4.b. Make physical choices to develop a character in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Re7.1.4.a. Identify artistic choices made in a drama/theatre work through participation and observation.

TH:Cr1.1.5.c. Imagine how a character's inner thoughts impact the story and given circumstances in a drama/ theatre work

TH:Pr4.1.5.b. Use physical choices to create meaning in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Cr:1.1.6.c. Explore a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Pr4.1.6.b. Experiment with various physical choices to communicate character in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Cr:1.1.7.c. Envision and describe a scripted or improvised character's inner thoughts and objectives in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Cr:1.1.8.c. Develop a scripted or improvised character by articulating the character's inner thoughts, objectives, and motivations in a drama/theatre work.

Time to Teach: 1 Class Session; 75 minutes (can be broken into smaller chunks if needed)

Materials Required for Instruction:

index cards with characters from the play written on them (enough for each student, more than one student can have a single character)

half slips of blank computer paper

markers

Opening:

This lesson makes use of a reflective questioning sequence called DAR or Describe-Analyze-Relate. In this scaffolded process, the aim is to get multiple responses to each question (constructivism) and students can respond in a variety of ways (verbal, drawing, gesture, etc.).

In today's lesson we will explore several activities that dive deep into character, allowing us to compare and contrast (between other characters and between ourselves and a character) and identify behaviors that link to character traits. Diving deep into character will allow us to understand both the playwright's intentions, an actor's interpretations, and how theatre serves as a mirror to our society, specifically when thinking about human actions and interactions. Finally, all of these activities will ask us, as a group, to collaborate, noting that we can actively learn, reflect, and play together to build new understandings. Some of these activities will ask you to practice "yes, and" as you work to honor the contributions of others. (SEL: Self Awareness- Social Awareness)

[The Truth About Me] (SEL: Self Awareness)

You will remain in the circle, please take a piece of tape to mark your spot. (Pass out tape.)

We are going to play The Truth About Me. To remind ourselves of the directions, the person in the middle is searching for a spot. They say, "My name is _____ and the truth about me is _____." If this is also true for you, you will move to find a new spot.

Before we begin, how might we play this game safely? (Get three rules.)

Let's play The Truth About Me. (Play multiple rounds.)

Now we will play as a character from the play we are reading. I am going to give you a character card. I would like you to think about this character. What might you say if you are in the middle, what is true for this character? (SEL: Social Awareness)

[Ensure that the characters you selected work for this game, you do not have to use all the characters in the play. You can allow students to brainstorm facts on their card and write them down before playing this round.]

We will play again, but this time instead of saying your name, you will say your character's name and something that is true about them. If the statement is also true for your character you will move to find a different place in the circle.

Let's play The Truth About Me. (Play multiple rounds.)

Reflect

Describe: What were some of the commonalities we found between the characters?

Analyze: What characters might have been easier/harder to compare and contrast? Why?

Relate: What is something you personally have in common with a character? (SEL: Self Awareness-Social Awareness)

Transition: *Now that we reviewed some of the characters and found commonalities and differences between them, we are going to expand out to look at all the characters in the play by creating a visual map.*

Instructional Procedures:

[Visual Mapping] (SEL: Social Awareness)

We are going to work in two groups (can do more groups if a larger class). Each group will get a stack of paper and some markers.

In your group, please name as many characters from the play as you can. Write each character on a new slip of paper. Consider “larger roles” and “small roles”! And maybe anyone we hear of, but don’t see. Lay them out on the floor.

(Students can look in the play after a few minutes if needed.)

Now I would like you to sort these into groupings based on the relationships the characters have with each other. Map them visually (on the floor), how do the groups connect, how do the people connect? Move your characters around in order to show relationships between them.

Now, in a different color marker, I would like you to label settings of the play around the outside of the character map, or if specific locals match groups of characters, note that.

(Students can look in the play after a few minutes if needed.)

Reflect:

Describe: What did we just do in this strategy? How did we do it (logistically)?

Analyze: What did you/your group discover by visually mapping the characters? What characters were hard to place on the map, and why is that (as connected to the play)?

Relate: How did this ask you to think dramaturgically? (or) How did you use the skills of a dramaturgy to complete this activity? (SEL: Self Awareness- Social Awareness)

Transition: *Now that we have identified the characters in the play and their relationships, we are going to dive deeper into character analysis with one specific character (of your choice) from the play.*

[Sculptor/Clay]

Select one of the characters from the visual map that you feel you know well and have the ability to dive deeper with. I would like you to think about that character’s traits. Please refer to the list if needed - https://www.readwritethink.org/sites/default/files/resources/p-as_docs/sample_character_traits.pdf Remember, we understand a character’s traits through their behaviors or actions.

I would like you to write each character trait on a new sheet of paper, do not write the character’s name. You will work to get 3-4 character traits for your character. (Model.) (SEL: Social Awareness)

Select a partner. Each partner will get a turn to be a sculptor and clay. If you are a sculptor, you will mold the clay in one of three different ways: string like a puppet, gently move their body with consent, or mirroring. You will discuss which of the three ways is most comfortable for you and your partner before you begin. When sculpting, think about a moment of action in the play and/or how you might show a character trait physically on the body. You will use your character traits to sculpt, don’t tell your partner who the character is (only you know)!

Side-coaching:

- *Remember this is a silent activity.*
- *Think about how an actor or director communicates with an audience through an actor's body.*
- *How can you keep your partner safe and in a position they can comfortably hold?*

When you go to a museum, you sometimes see a plaque in front of the statues that gives you a little more detail of what the artist was thinking or context of the work. Please place your character traits in front of your statue. Statues stay frozen, everyone else take a gallery walk.

Reflect:

Describe: Describe what you are seeing in the bodies (levels, positions, facials, etc.).

Analyze: How do you see some of the character traits represented in the statues?

Relate: What character do you think a specific statue might be? And what moment from the play? What makes you say that?

Now, let's repeat with the other half. You will switch, if you were clay, you are now a sculptor. You will use your character traits to sculpt, don't tell your partner who the character is (only you know)!

If you are a sculptor, you will mold the clay in one of three different ways: string like a puppet, gently move their body with consent, or mirroring. You will discuss which of the three ways is most comfortable for you and your partner before you begin. When sculpting, think about a moment of action in the play and/or how you might show a character trait physically on the body.

Side-coaching:

- *Remember this is a silent activity.*
- *Think about how an actor or director communicates with an audience through an actor's body.*
- *How can you keep your partner safe and in a position they can comfortably hold?*

When you go to a museum, you sometimes see a plaque in front of the statues that gives you a little more detail of what the artist was thinking or context of the work. Please place your character traits in front of your statue. Statues stay frozen, everyone else take a gallery walk.

Reflect:

Describe: Describe what you are seeing in the bodies (levels, positions, facials, etc.).

Analyze: How do you see some of the character traits represented in the statues?

Relate: What character do you think a specific statue might be? And what moment from the play? What makes you say that?

Transition: *Let's make a standing circle.*

Reflect:

Let's take a final moment to reflect on our whole lesson.

Our lesson today focused on social awareness, which is the ability to take the perspective of others, demonstrate empathy, acknowledge and appreciate similarities and differences, and understand how one's actions influence and are influenced by others.

Describe: What were some of the strategies that we did today to explore character? What did we do in that specific strategy? What skills did we practice/learn?

Analyze: What is a character trait? How do we identify a character trait in a play/when reading a play?

Relate: How would it help you (as an actor) to find how you relate to a character? What might you do as an actor if you are very different than your character?

Assessment:

Visual Mapping, Character Facts/Details, and Describe, Analyze, Relate Questions with Side-coaching (During the Lesson)

3	2	1
The student answers the question(s) and offers details and specifics when asked a follow-up question. The student uses personal experiences and prior knowledge to make connections to community and culture in a drama/theatre work. The student often uses the text as support or as a resource.	The student answers the question(s) but lacks details or specifics when asked a follow-up question. The student sometimes uses personal experiences and prior knowledge to make connections to community and culture in a drama/theatre work. The student is unclear how to use the text as support or as a resource.	The student cannot answer the question(s). The student does not use personal experiences or prior knowledge to make connections to community or culture in a drama/theatre work. The student does not use the text as support or as a resource.

Teacher Observation of Image and Role Work (During the Drama)

3	2	1
The student uses their body and voice in a way that is fitting with the given circumstances of the story to deepen, connect, and reflect. The student works individually and collaboratively to embody characters.	The student uses their body and voice, but in a way that does not fit with the given circumstances of the story, or does not deepen, connect, and reflect. The student works individually or collaboratively to embody characters.	The student does not use their body and voice to respond to the prompt. The student cannot work individually or collaboratively to embody characters.

Summative Assessment:

Picture, Video, or Physical Artifact of Student Work with Individual Reflection After

3	2	1
The student describes the choices that they made with their body/voice or through visual/written text and explains how it connects to the text with details and specifics and connects to other moments in the story. The student is able to compare/contrast student work and identify their own growth opportunities for skill development.	The student describes the choices that they made with their body/voice or through visual/written text and explains how it connects to the text but lacks details or specifics. The student is able to compare/contrast student work and identify their own growth opportunities for skill development but lacks details or specifics.	The student cannot describe the choices that they made with their body/voice or through visual/written text, nor can they explain how it connects to the text. The student is not able to compare/contrast student work or evaluate their own growth opportunities for skill development.

Closing:

Today we began to think about how we relate to characters and how behaviors and actions shape character traits. This can also be translated outside the theatre classroom to HOW we interact with friends, family, or classmates as well. We might find ways we are similar or different from other people but can still be friends. Additionally, we want to be aware that our character (as perceived by others) is identified by our individual behaviors and actions.

Learning for all: Please use the space below for suggestions for any specific adaptations or accommodations needed for neuro-diverse or atypical learners.

In the lesson, students can reference the play/story/text as much as needed. This lesson makes use of various ways to sculpt/make statues, with student agency and choice. At any moment, the teacher can stop and discuss before embodying to ensure student success. The teacher should also make use of side-coaching to support, encourage, and challenge students appropriately (differentiated instruction).

How does this lesson's content model inclusivity and honor diversity?

This lesson uses a play's characters as a point to explore similarities and differences (to self and between other characters). Students can offer movements that work for their bodies while also attending to the physical capabilities of others (ensuring safety and accessibility). Students can translate the movement offering of others into their own body in a way that works for them. The open-ended reflection questions should be answered by getting multiple responses to a question before moving on, thus encouraging dialogic meaning-making (Dawson & Lee, 2018).

Works Cited:

Character Traits List - https://www.readwritethink.org/sites/default/files/resources/p-as_docs/sample_character_traits.pdf

Additional Tools & Resources:

The Truth About Me - <https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/content/truth-about-me-0>

Visual Mapping - <https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/content/visual-mapping>

Sculptor Clay - <https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/content/sculptorclay>

What is a character trait? -

https://www.readwritethink.org/sites/default/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson175/RWT186-1.pdf

Character Traits Worksheet -

https://www.readwritethink.org/sites/default/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson175/RWT186-2.pdf