

Convincing Characters

Teacher's Page

Connecting Literature:

Shiloh by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor

Purpose: to create vivid, active characters

Introduction: Creating a believable person requires more than knowing what the character likes and dislikes. There are specific types of characters that authors need to place in their stories. The most common characters, of course, are the hero (protagonist) and the enemy (antagonist). (For brevity's sake, "hero" will be used to designate both male and female main characters.) Most students will probably produce stories with only these two characters, but more sophisticated writers may want to include other types such as the helper and the wise person.

The hero must be someone with whom the reader can identify, but like a real person, one who cannot be all good. Not all heroes are equally motivated to face the problems that they will encounter within the story. The hero also can be any age and from any walk of life.

The enemy is usually a person who stands in the way of the hero's goal, but it may also be something in the environment. (Spiders and tornadoes come to mind!) Enemies are not necessarily mean; sometimes they just have a point of view that differs from the hero's.

The helper may do a number of things, from pointing out possible solutions to creating comic relief.

The wise person is someone in whom the hero confides or who may have special knowledge that can help the hero obtain his or her goal and experience internal change.

Student Practice: Discuss the characters in the suggested titles or in other works with which you are familiar. Ask students to help create a brief list of novels they have read and discuss the various character types that appear within these books. Think about the nature of each hero. Is each one completely good, or does each have a flaw that gets them into trouble? Who, or what, is the enemy in the book? Is there a wise person? A helper? Any other character "types"? Provide students with copies of page 38 to help them create characters. For variety, reproduce and laminate page 39, cut out the cards, and make a few sets of character shuffle cards for the class to use. Students can create new and interesting stories based on the characters they choose from the shuffle cards.

Extensions: As a logical extension, ask students to draft stories using the characters they have created. You may wish to use read-around groups of four or five students in which peer editors judge each other's characters for believability.



Story People

Day 1: Create a story hero. The hero can be anyone, from a kindergarten student to a zoo keeper. Keep in mind that the hero must have a flaw—something within his or her character that causes a problem. Write 15 or more lines describing how the hero looks, what he or she likes and dislikes, what others like and dislike about the hero, and the best and worst qualities the hero possesses.

Day 2: Create a story enemy to interact with the hero. Again, the enemy might be anyone but should be opposite from the hero in some way. For example, if the hero is generous, the enemy might be greedy. Describe the enemy's looks, likes and dislikes, etc.

Day 3: Write three ideas for stories in which your characters might be involved. Also, think about the type of setting in which you might place both of these characters. Sometimes putting people into places that they are not normally found can create an interesting situation.

Day 4: Create a scene in which your characters talk to each other. Think about the actual words that each type of person might use. Even characters who are the same age may have very different ways of expressing themselves.

Character Shuffle Cards

<p>Hero</p>  <p>The Athlete</p>	<p>Hero</p>  <p>The Detective</p>	<p>Hero</p>  <p>The Scientist</p>	<p>Hero</p>  <p>The Artist</p>
<p>Enemy</p>  <p>The Snob</p>	<p>Enemy</p>  <p>The Brat</p>	<p>Enemy</p>  <p>The Party Pooper</p>	<p>Enemy</p>  <p>The Know-It-All</p>
<p>Wise One</p>  <p>The Old One</p>	<p>Wise One</p>  <p>The Teacher</p>	<p>Wise One</p>  <p>The Aunt</p>	<p>Wise One</p>  <p>The Police Officer</p>
<p>Helper</p>  <p>The Buddy</p>	<p>Helper</p>  <p>The Dog</p>	<p>Helper</p>  <p>The Comic</p>	<p>Helper</p>  <p>The Brain</p>