Grade 3 Playlist: Describe Characters in a Story

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3:

- Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events

Welcome

Fiction books contain characters. The characters are the people, animals, or objects in the book who are doing the action. Describing the characters helps readers better understand the plot, or the sequence of events in a story. Readers can describe characters by telling what they look like, how they feel, how they act, or what they think.

Objectives

In this playlist, the student will learn and practice how to:

- describe the traits, motivations, and feelings of characters.

- explain how characters' actions contribute to the sequence of events in a story.

Exploring the Standard

A Closer Look: Describing Characters

One way to describe characters is to tell what they look like. This description may include the character's hair color, eye color, or other important physical features. This information helps the reader to picture the character. However, it does not usually explain what makes the character behave in the way he or she does.

Character traits relate to the personality of a character. Examples of character traits are: jealous, warm, picky, helpful, etc. These words describe what the character is like without describing what the character looks like.

Read!

This resource has a list of character trait words:

- http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson175/traits.pdf

Practice!

Complete these worksheets to practice identifying character traits:

- http://www.ereadingworksheets.com/reading-worksheets/characterization-worksheet-1.pdf

- http://www.ereadingworksheets.com/reading-worksheets/characterization-worksheet-4.pdf

A character's **motivations** are what make the character act in the way that she or he does. If the character has a big test the next day, for example, then the character might stay up all night. The action is staying up all night. The motivation is wanting to do well on the big test.

Watch!

Watch this video to see examples of character motivations in a specific story:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Yu_IcOXcNY

A character's **feelings** are how the character feels about something. Just like real people, characters can feel excited, sad, nervous, happy, etc. A character feels different emotions during different parts of the story.

Example 1

In *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, the narrator describes Sara's life at a boarding school. Sara starts out as a student at the school, but after her family loses their money, she is forced to work at the school.

> [1]If she had been older, Miss Minchin would have given her the bigger girls to teach and saved money by dismissing an instructress; but while she remained and looked like a child, she could be made more useful as a sort of little superior errand girl and maid of all work. An ordinary errand boy would not have been so clever and reliable. Sara could be trusted with difficult commissions and complicated messages. She could even go and pay bills, and she combined with this the ability to dust a room well and to set things in order.
>
> [2]Her own lessons became things of the past. She was taught nothing, and only after long and busy days spent in running here and there at everybody's orders was she grudgingly allowed to go into the deserted schoolroom, with a pile of old books, and study alone at night.
>
> [3]"If I do not remind myself of the things I have learned, perhaps I may forget them," she said to herself. "I am almost a scullery maid, and if I am a scullery maid who knows nothing, I shall be like poor Becky. I wonder if I could QUITE forget and begin to drop my H'S and not remember that Henry the Eighth had six wives."

In these paragraphs, the reader learns several things about Sara, the main character. The reader learns that Sara is "clever and reliable," and that she can "be trusted." These words help the reader determine Sara's character traits.

The reader also learns Sara's motivations. Sara does not want to forget the things that she has learned. So, she is motivated to study alone at night, after she has finished her work for the day.

A Closer Look: Explaining How Characters' Actions Contribute to the Sequence of Events

Characters shape the plot of a story. The choices they make lead to different events in the story. So, the characters' actions are important because they drive the sequence of events. A character's traits, motivations, and feelings often help determine how that character will act.

Teaching Notes: Describe Characters in a Story

The goal of RL.3.3 is for students to be able to describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events. In addition, students should understand that physical appearance is not the only way to describe a character. Rather, character traits and motivations are even more important when discussing characters and how they relate to the plot of a story. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Use the excerpts from the playlist. Have students use a graphic organizer to describe either Sara from *A Little Princess* or Peter from *Peter and Wendy*. Hold a class discussion where students share the character traits they identified and explain how the characters' actions help shape the plot.

2. Incorporate discussions of character traits, motivations, feelings, and actions that contribute to the sequence of events into your class read-aloud. As you read the book and discuss it, record student ideas on a large poster to display in the classroom.

3. Fables can be useful texts for practicing standard RL.3.3 because they are concise, and because characters tend to have one or two defining traits. Read a fable, such as "The Lion and the Mouse," together as a class. Ask students to describe characters using details from the fable to support their answers. Have students answer questions about how a character's actions contribute to the sequence of events in the story.

Writing Prompts

1. Assign students a grade-appropriate excerpt from a fictional text with strong characters and ask students to write a paragraph answering this question: Which character trait best describes the character? Include at least two details from the text to support your answer.

2. Have students imagine an interesting character. Ask students to write a short story about that character. In the story, students should include details that show the character's personality, thoughts, and feelings. The character's actions should cause some event to happen. Encourage students to share their stories with the rest of the class.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RL.3.3:

These resources describe several ideas for in-class activities that target standard RL.3.3.

- http://www.readtennessee.org/teachers/common_core_standards/3rd_grade/reading_literature/rl33/rl33_activities.aspx

- http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/top-teaching/2012/11/teaching-character-traits-readers-workshop