



SPHERE Fostering Civil Discourse and Diverse Viewpoints for Every Classroom

Civil Discourse: Character Development Helps Us See Who We Are (13 and 14)

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Learning Objectives

- Analyze characters in a work of literature (can be a whole-class novel or a short story with great characterization, such as “Raymond’s Run” by Toni Cade Bambara)
- Answer questions generated by other students
- Cite examples from the text to answer the questions



Essential Questions

How do characters develop throughout a story? What factors contribute to a character's growth or change? How does understanding character development enhance our understanding of not only the story but also ourselves?

Media

- Copies of the story being used or, if using a book, copies of the pages being used for that day's activities
- Sticky notes for students to write down questions
- Whiteboard and markers

Part I: Reading the Text

WARM-UP

Before starting, review norms from the first lesson in this unit or use that lesson to discuss and create norms before proceeding.

Here are some norm examples, although it is best if students create these norms as a class.

- Respect other people's opinions.
- Try to understand other people's points of view; listen to understand, not to respond.
- Participate, participate, participate.
- Respect all opinions.
- Be rational in responding; attack ideas, not people.

Begin by discussing the essential questions with the class. Ask students to share what they know about the story so far. If it is a new work, preview the text with the students by talking about themes and important characters. Introduce the concept of character development, focusing on the following aspects:

- the character's identity: what the character thinks, what the reader thinks, what other characters think about who they are;
- the character's actions: what they love, who they love, what they do, and why; and
- the character's background: where they live, what they do, and how that shapes what they believe.

Share with students that they will be looking at these aspects as they read during the class period.

Read, Share, and Discuss

Have students read the pages or work assigned. Ask students to mark up the text, looking for the development of character. Remind them of the 3 parts of character: identity, actions, and background.

After students have read and marked up the text, have them get into small groups and discuss what they've observed. Each group should be given a stack of 6 sticky notes for an activity after the discussion. To stay organized, each group can be given a number. Record the group numbers and members for use in the next class period.

Here are some questions that might aid in the discussion:

- What is the main character's identity and background?
- How did the main character change over the course of the story? What actions contributed to this change?
- What events or interactions contributed to the main character's development?
- Are there any other characters who underwent significant changes? If so, how did they change?
- What social and emotional challenges did the characters face, and how did they cope with them?
- What coping mechanisms did they employ to deal with these challenges?
- How do your own life experiences relate to the characters' experiences?

Closing the Lesson

While they are still in groups, ask students to create questions that will aid in the whole-class discussion for the next class period. Each group should create 6 questions beginning with who, what, when, where, why, and how. Each question should be written on a separate sticky note with the group members or group number clearly marked on the back.

Completed questions should be given to the teacher at the end of class.

Question stems that can be shared:

- Who is the character that ... ?
- What happens to ... ?
- Where does [character name] ... ?
- When will ... ?
- Why is ... ?
- How does ... ?

This is a good stopping place if the reading takes more time or the discussion goes long.

Part II: Using Class-Generated Questions to Lead Discussion

WARM-UP

Have the previous day's sticky note questions up on the wall. Give students a moment to pick a question that is different than the one their group wrote during the last class period. To save time, you can also pass out the sticky note questions to the students or have students answer their own question.

Each student should answer the question they picked on a piece of paper or in their notebook.

Discuss the questions and the answers as time permits. After talking with at least 2–3 students and discussing their answers, ask students to turn their answers into a complete paragraph.

Ask students to find a quote from the reading to back up what they are thinking. Encourage them to write a 3 sentence response.

- Sentence 1: Turn the question into a sentence by restating it.
- Sentence 2: I know this because the text says, "_____."
- Sentence 3: This shows that [character name] . . .
- Sentence 4: This relates/does not relate to me because I . . . OR This reminds me of . . .

Have 2–3 students share their answers with the class.

ASK

How does character development help us understand literature? How does it help us understand ourselves and the choices we make?

Closing the Lesson

Have students complete their 3 sentence paragraph and turn it in at the end of class.

Common Core State Standards

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3:** Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1:** Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.