

Literacy and the Law



Lesson Title: We are all Characters! (Lesson One)

Context of the lesson within the project: This theatre lesson is at the beginning of the unit, No David! Introduction to the Rule of Law. In the unit, students will take on the roles of characters in a mock trial and as members of a jury. This theatre lesson is designed to help students learn about “character” so they portray their role effectively and are able to .

Standards Addressed:
California Visual and Performing Arts, Theatre

Creative Expression:

2.1 Participate in improvisational activities to explore complex ideas and universal themes in literature and life.

Essential Questions/Issues in this lesson: Are characters predictable?

Objective(s):

Students will participate in learning activities and gain an understanding of ways “character” can be portrayed through dialogue, movement, and facial expression, and that the character of a person involves their emotional state, physical characteristics, and state of mind (mental, beliefs).

***Assessment:** These objectives will be assessed through teacher observation

*Quality Criteria for assessment:

Active and productive engagement, student participation effectively demonstrates the traits of a character physically, mentally and emotionally. Character analysis handout notes show thoughtful insight of the description, reactions, behavior and appearance of David and the other character’s portrayed by individuals.

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	Absolutely	Almost	Not Yet
Active Engagement Productive participation			
Character portrayal Demonstrates traits physically, mentally and emotionally			
Character analysis Includes notes showing thoughtful insight to character			

Materials and Resources Needed: 2 copies of Handout #1, plenty of space for movement, Bell (or attention-getter!), Copies of the script of the trial for read-through.

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Lesson Activity Steps:

Hook: “Students, very soon you will become the characters in a courtroom drama, and will become either an attorney, judge, witness, defendant, or bailiff in a trial. For this reason we will prepare to take on the “role” of another character, just as actors do in order to be effective and believable.

Movement (5-10 minutes)

Whole Group: In theatre, what is a “character?” (an actor, someone who plays a role in a drama, or in a book, story)

How do you learn about, or get to know a character in a drama?

Probing question: For example, how do you know what he/she is feeling (emotions), problems they are having, attitudes, motivation, age? (Analysis)

(student responses, the way they act, what they say, how they say it, what they do, how they move....)

An actor develops the character he or she is portraying by first analyzing or thinking about the person’s role physically (body), and emotionally (feelings), and mentally (their mind)!

Let’s brainstorm a list of emotions (which you chart): (happy, sad, angry, scared, disgusted, concerned, etc....)

In place, have students, without a sound, **show what their body and facial expression would look like if they were sad, excited, nervous...**using emotions suggested by students.

What other ways can you learn more about a character?

By the way they move...

(age, role: troublemaker, peacemaker, emotions, age)

Ask them to “**unfreeze**” and **move around the room as if they are a tired “toddler”, and then freeze at bell, next, an “angry teenager”, a disgusted “teacher”, a careful “policeman”, a person with a backache.**

Move about the room following the prompts and freeze at the bell:

As an angry teacher, an esteemed judge, a thief sneaking away quietly, a defendant who has just been called to the stand...

Dialogue: (5-10 minutes)

What else helps to develop a character? (Dialogue) For example, one simple word expressed in different ways can have a completely different meaning. The way characters use dialogue can tell a lot about the character and what they are thinking, and feeling.

Pair students A and B together : Dialogue, Oh!)

A: (parent) Tells **B**, “You are not going to spend the night at your friend’s tonight because your progress report was poor.

B uses the dialogue :Oh!

B: (grandparent) Tells **A**, “This new little kitten is for you.”

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A uses the dialogue: Oh!

A: (Boyfriend) Tells **B** “ Here is a special ring for you.”

B uses the dialogue “Oh!”

B: (Judge) Tells **A**, “You have been found guilty.”

A uses the dialogue: Oh!

Point out that it is difficult for them not to use “body language” as they say their dialogue “Oh!” with different intonations and emotional responses ☺

Switch it: Use the dialogue “I’m sorry” to portray different attitudes or emotions ...For example, with a partner, decide on the scene: you just knocked into someone accidentally and all their books fell on the floor...partner says “I’m sorry”...Were they really sorry? Or did the tone show that they did it on purpose, were embarrassed as well as sorry?

Now students make up a scenario which would call for a different “I’m sorry” tone! Ask a few to share with the entire group.

Whole Group: 3 minutes

Review: Ask students what it is about the dialogue that creates the character...even when it is only one word?

(tone, attitude, inflection or the way one says the word))

Summary: If you were to portray or become another character as an actor, what would you need to analyze about him or her? The person’s physical, mental (what is in their mind), and their emotions (are they happy sad, jealous, etc.)

Continue to probe: How would you try to “be” them, or portray them as an actor?

Read the book, No David!,by David Shannon (10 minutes)

We will now read about a boy named David and have the chance to analyze him, thinking about what kind of character he is. (You may also want to read David Get’s in Trouble, and David Goes to School)

Character Analysis (10 minutes)

After reading the book(s), in pairs, have students analyze David’s character through the **handout #1**; either in whole group, or in pairs. If done in pairs, compare between groups. Were they similar or different? (handout below)...

Small Groups

Get students into groups of 8 and have a “read-through” of the mock trial. In theatre, actors have a read-through of a play before they begin rehearsals!

Closure: If you were an actor playing the part of David, would you know how to move, how to use dialogue or words? (Have one or more students show how David might enter the classroom, for example.)

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***Homework:**

1. Assign students their “character” for tomorrow’s “performance” of the script; in groups each student will portray one of the characters in the script.
2. In order to be ready for the trial tomorrow they must read the script and complete a character analysis (handout #1), just like what was done in class today for David.
3. Ask students to feel free to develop their character in an way appropriate for the script, for example, if you are Suzie, how will you want her to speak, walk? What will you want her attitude to be like, her emotions?

Ask students to bring props, or costume pieces such as a hat for David or Stevie, or a scarf for Mrs. Applegate, a bow for the hair of Suzie, a badge or handcuffs for the bailiff, a black robe for the judge.

Props, costumes and music help to portray characters and set the scene in theatre.

Special Needs of students are considered in this lesson: Varied grouping strategies help for differentiation and collaborative learning. The use of auditory and kinesthetic activity is helpful for all learners. The dialogue is simple enough for ELL’s and other Special Needs to understand the book, and the use of dialogue and movement with one’s own portrayal does not limit the GATE students who may offer some deeper perspectives .

Extension Ideas: Use this character lesson and character analysis to analyze more complex characters in literature books, historical events, current events – what motivates “characters”?

References:

No David! By David Shannon

California State Content Standards for the Visual and Performing Arts

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Character Analysis: Describe the character!



What kind of “ethics” or behavior does he/she possess? Does he/she make wise choices?

Considering the age of your character, how might your character react to circumstances, or things that happen, such as getting into trouble?

What is your character’s physical appearance ? What does he/she look like, “move” like?

What are the personality traits, roles, and challenges for your character?

What does he/she act like?

What is difficult for your character?

What do you think he/she likes to do?

What motivates your character?

Handout #1