

5 Character Development

Read It, Write It, Tell It Episode: "Jesse Owens"

Lesson Overview

The purpose of the lessons in this unit is to help Ohio students in grades 3-7 learn the characteristics of the literary text Character Development indicators that they must master for their respective Ohio achievement tests. Special care has been taken to dovetail the lessons with the indicators and the types of questions commonly asked on Ohio tests. The lessons are divided into two sections: Grades 3-4 and Grades 5-7.

Ohio Academic Content Indicators

- 2001.EL.S05.GKG-03.BB.L03.I02 Use concrete details from the text to describe characters and setting.
- 2001.EL.S05.G04-07.BA.L04.I01 Describe the thoughts, words and interactions of characters.

Ohio Achievement/Proficiency Tests Character Development Question Types

- Who is the main character?

Emotions

- Character X feels Emotion Y. Give details from the story that show why the character was feeling Emotion Y.
- Quotation XXX from the selection describes *Character X*. Which word from the quotation tells how Character X is feeling?
- How does Character A feel at point B in the selection.
- How does a Character X feel (at the time of, about, after) Event X?

Thoughts/Actions/Behaviors/Attitudes/Motivations

- At Point Y in the selection, what makes Character X do Action Z?
- Pick out, list or web the things Character X does at Point Y in the selection.
- What did Character X do to make sure Event Y happened as s/he thought/wished it to happened?

Jesse Owens

Episode Overview

This episode is about the life of Jesse Owens. It interweaves fact, fiction, and tall tale. The episode begins when Jesse was a boy living on a farm and briefly tells of his move to Cleveland, joining a track team and becoming a champion runner at Ohio State University. The tall tale portion of the episode takes place during the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany.

Teachers will need to need to briefly build a background with their students if they have never been exposed to the United States' history of the time period in which this episode takes place. Major historical events occurring during this episode are listed below.

Fact:

- Jesse (1913-1980) lived at a time when blacks were faced with segregation and "No Blacks Allowed" signs.
- His family originally farmed for a living (before moving to Ohio) and Jesse did work as a delivery boy.
- He lived during the Great Depression.

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- He was a star runner for Ohio State University and he won four gold medals in the 1936 Berlin Olympics when Adolph Hitler was in power touting the superiority of the white German Aryan race over all other races.

Fiction:

- Jesse saved the lives of his prejudiced boss's wife and children from the speeding truck the boss was heedlessly driving.

Tall Tale:

- Jesse defeated a time machine ray gun Hitler's scientists developed to slow Jesse in his Olympic races and destroyed the lab where the time machine weapons were made so that Hitler cannot use them in war.

Vocabulary

The following words used by the storyteller in the *Read It, Write It, Tell It* episode "Jesse Owens" may be unfamiliar to some students.

athlete
conquer
dictator
disintegrated

Great Depression
laboratory
Melting Pot
modesty
mysterious

nationality
Olympics
prejudice
separate

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Before Viewing

1. Ask: What is a story? *Most students will probably associate the word story with a piece of fiction that tells about a group of events that are related to one another. The word story can be defined as the retelling of events, either true or fictional. Accept reasonable answers.*
2. Say: Think about the story [name a story with which the students are well acquainted, for example Goldilocks and the Three Bears].
3. Ask: Who are the main characters in the story? *Answers will depend upon the story chosen.*
4. Ask: Do all stories have main characters? *Most all fiction stories have characters.*
5. Ask: How would you tell the story if it had no characters? *Students may have no logical answers for this question.*
6. Say: As we view this *Read It, Write It, Tell It* episode “Jesse Owens”, think about the characters the storyteller, J. D. Williamson mentions. Be prepared to answer the following questions.
 - a. What are their names?
 - b. Which ones are most important to the story and why are they important?
 - c. Are the characters real?
 - d. Why do the characters behave as they do?

After Viewing

Pre/Post Questions: If the students cannot easily answer the following questions, you may wish to use the Lessons (Section 4) and/or the Extensions (Section 5) about character development.

1. List two characteristics of Jesse Owens. Support your answer with details from the episode.
Answers will vary. Accept reasonable responses. Students may say that Jesse was a fast runner, he was black, he ignored the actions prejudiced people directed toward him, he was dedicated to whatever he set his mind to do, etc.
2. The storyteller (J. D. Williamson) says that Jesse was modest. Do you agree or disagree? Support your opinion with details from the story.
Jesse is modest. Accept reasonable answers. Answers might include: When the storyteller has Jesse working for a prejudiced man, he has Jesse say “I’m here to do a job, the very best that I can do; just like any other man.” This shows that he does not feel superior to any other man. After Jesse was selected to run on the United States Olympic team, the storyteller quotes Jesse “I’m not running for myself, I’m running for my country, and everyone else who loves America and freedom around the world!” This shows that Jesse does not put himself before others.
3. Jesse ignores people’s bad feelings and prejudice toward him and goes on with his life. Give details from the story that supports this statement.
Accept reasonable answers. Jesse continues to work as a delivery man even when the boss does not treat him well. The storyteller has Jesse save the man’s family from a speeding truck. Jesse runs in the Olympics in Germany even though Adolph Hitler was prejudiced against him – and many other groups of people.
4. List two people from the story who are prejudiced against Jesse.
Two people who are prejudice against Jesse are his boss when he worked as a delivery person and Adolph Hitler at the 1936 Olympic Games.

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5. Here is a list of behaviors. Which one is most like the Jesse Owens in this story? Justify your answer with proof from the episode.
- Jesse sees a horse that is badly stuck in the mud but he has to ignore it because he is almost late for an important race.
 - Jesse's best friend asks Jesse to loan him some money and Jesse tells him no.
 - Jesse answers a "Help Wanted" ad in the newspaper but finds a "No Blacks Allowed" sign in the shop window. Later that night Jesse returns to the shop and breaks all of the windows.
 - Jesse is running in a cross-country race and comes across a lost child. He stops racing and helps the child find its parents.

Based upon the character developed by the storyteller, answer d. Jesse is running in a cross-country race and comes across a lost child. He stops racing and helps the child find its parents. Justifications will vary. Accept reasonable answers. For example: In the story, Jesse always chose to do the "right" thing even when it might not be good for him personally. Jesse saved the family of his boss when he knew that his boss did not like him.

Lesson

Materials:

- Student Handout "Exploring Your Main Character"
- Student Handout "Exploring Simon Harrington"
- A short story or passage that features a well-developed character.

Procedure:

1. Display the handout "Exploring Your Main Character". Display the handout via computer, a projected image, or give each student a blank copy.
2. Discuss the main divisions of the character development on handout: 2. physical description (the rectangle), 3. conflict (the hexagon), and 4. non-physical character traits (the trapezoid).
3. Whole class activity. Choose a story with which the students are familiar and have the students collaborate to fill in the "Exploring Your Main Character" based on what they know about the main character and the plot of that story.
 - a. Explain to the students that not everything in the chart happened or was described in the source story so they will need to think about the character and the story and then use their imaginations to complete the chart.
 - b. The story could be a selection which the students have read or listened to, a well known children's book or story, a recent movie or media production with which they are familiar, etc.
 - c. Discuss how knowing how a character acts or behaves in known events can help readers/listeners/viewers to predict how they would probably behave in new events.
 - d. Fill "Exploring Your Main Character" for the selected story as a group and discuss the results.

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4. Group Activity. Break the students into collaborative groups.
 - a. Tell the students that they will be creating a character totally from their own imaginations. One student may act as the recorder for the group's ideas but each student should have a personal copy of the handout to which to refer. You may wish to give them a copy of the student handout "Exploring Simon Harrington" so that they can see a completed example. If there is not enough room on the handout to write all of the group's ideas, students may write on a separate sheet of paper or use a computer's word processing application.
 - b. Have the students share their work with their classmates.
 - c. Ask each group to come up with a new story event that is not already listed as an idea in Part 4, the trapezoid.
5. Individual Activity.
 - a. Each student will write a story based on the Parts 1, 2, and 3 of the handout "Exploring Your Main Character." Explain that Part 4 tells how their character would react to a few events that could happen. Students will have the option of choosing one or more of the events listed – or they are free to create a new event(s) for their stories.
 - b. Give each student a new copy of the "Exploring Your Main Character" handout to help them with their planning and organizing. Tell the students that they may use the handout as they choose. They may write brief notes on the handout, simply refer to the blank handout for ideas, or fill it in completely.
 - c. Write the stories. Stories may be written on paper, typed into computers, or told to scribes or recording devices. Differentiated instruction: Provide a scribe in the form of an older student, a classroom aid or volunteer, etc. to write for students who cannot write. Students could also dictate or tell their stories to a recording device.
 - d. Publish the stories. Completed stories can be bound into a classroom book, typed into a computer and uploaded to your school's website, or told orally and recorded via video recorder to be turned into digital video images for emailing to parents or sharing via podcasts on the Internet.

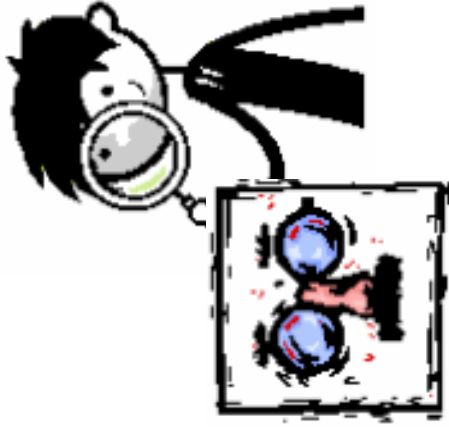
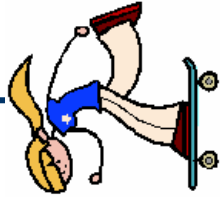
Exploring Your Main Character

2.

A. What type of being is it? _____
(Is it a human being, an animal, or some other type of being like a space alien or a talking toaster?)

B. Describe your character's physical looks.

C. Describe anything else special about how it looks.

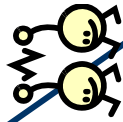


1. Character's Name:

3. Friends and/or Helpers

A. Name any friends or helper characters:

B. Tell why they are friends or why they want to help.



C. Name any enemies or villains:

D. Tell why they don't get along with the main character.



Enemies and/or Villains

4. Actions and Behaviors

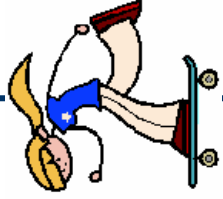
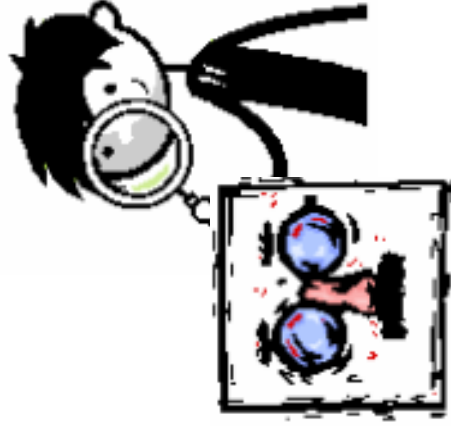
How would your main character act or behave if...

A. ...s/he could never go home again.

B. ...s/he was given a gift of lots and lots of money.

C. ...his/her friend or helper was in big trouble.

Main Character Example: Exploring Simon Harrington



2. What type of being is it? Simon Harrington is a human being. *(Is it a human being, an animal, or some other type of being like a space alien or a talking toaster?)*
- B. Describe your character's physical looks.
- Simon is a 11 year old boy who has bright red hair that sticks straight up on top. He is missing one front tooth and he has a lot of freckles on his nose and cheeks. He always smiles. His eyes are bluish-green and he squints some but he doesn't wear glasses. He is a little taller than his classmates and thin. His arms are pretty strong and he is the fastest runner in his whole grade. He usually wears tennis shoes, jeans, and a T-shirt that says, "Disney World" on the front.
- C. Describe anything else special about how it looks.

Simon has a birthmark on his right upper arm that looks like the continent of Africa.

1. Character's Name:

Simon Harrington

3. Friends and/or Helpers

A. Name any friends or helper characters:

Jerry Yarrow and Moshe Kinton

B. Tell why they are friends or why they want to help.

Jerry and Moshe are Simon's friends because they have known each other since 1st grade, they all love to watch the same Saturday morning cartoons, eating pizza with sausage and hot peppers, and exploring.

C. Name any enemies or villains:

Margaret Underwood

D. Tell why they don't get along with the main character.

Margaret doesn't like Simon because she thinks that he is the one who told her teacher that she was cheating on the Science test. Simon is not the one who reported Margaret.

Enemies and/or Villains



4. Actions and Behaviors

How would your main character act or behave if...

A. ...s/he could never go home again.

He wouldn't care too much. His parents died when he was 4 and he lives with an aunt who is not home much. He thinks she likes him a little but he is not sure.

B. ...s/he was given a gift of lots and lots of money.

Simon would give his friends some of it, buy a new television and 3 pizzas, and then put the rest of it in the bank. He really wants to become a scientist – and he'll have to pay for college.

C. ...his/her friend or helper was in big trouble.

He'd do almost anything he could to help them. He is loyal to his friends. He thinks of Jerry and Moshe as his brothers and he's sure that they would help him if he was in trouble.

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Extension Activities

Character Development • Teaching Suggestions

- Role play:
 - News reporter interviews story character and asks the character to explain why s/he choose specific actions and how s/he feels about events and other characters in the story.
 - Adopt a character's personality and interact to a new event in a manner that is consistent with the character developed by the author.
- Write journal entries as a character. The writer is to imagine feelings and actions that might have occurred before the story took place – or after the story ended.
- Create masks for characters where the facial expression on the mask suits the characters' dominant personality trait.
- Write a poem about a character's actions and what kind of character s/he was.
- Design an imaginary résumé for one of the story's characters showing his/her experience and qualifications.
- Write riddles or jokes that reflect a character's personality.
- Compare and contrast the problem solving abilities of two different characters in the story.
- If a character changed by the end of the story, list reasons that explain why and how the character changed.
- Use a graphic organizer to create a web of a character's physical and personality traits.
- Character Trading Cards:
 - http://readwritethink.org/materials/trading_cards/
 - This interactive online site prompts users to type in a character's appearance, personality, thoughts, feelings, major problem, goal, outcome, actions, interactions, and the student's likes, dislikes, and personal connections to the character.
 - After entering the information the "card" can be printed in full color, cut out, taped together, and a picture of the character may be added to the front of the card.

Character Development • Online Resources

Ohio Instructional Management System

- <https://ims.ode.state.oh.us>. Use the IMS Quick Search:
- Chose ☉ Lesson Plans, Content Area: English – Reading ▼, Grade Level: as desired ▼, Keyword: type Dialogue. Click Search.

"Punctuating Dialogue - Grade Six"

- In this lesson, students create and accurately punctuate dialogue necessary to help the plot progress, reference setting and develop character.

Ohio Resource Center • Reading http://www.ohiorc.org/search/search_adv.aspx

- Advanced Search: Choose Free Text and ORC Number from the drop down menus and type the ORC Lesson number in the center box. Scroll down and click Submit. For example:
Search for resources that...contain in the

"Charlotte is Wise, Patient, and Caring: Adjectives and Character Traits," Grades 3-4

- ORC Lesson# 2773
- In this activity, students apply their knowledge of adjectives as they study characterization. Students locate examples of adjectives in a text, then describe one of the major characters.

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“Cinderella Folktales: Variations in Character,” Grades 3-4

- ORC Lesson# 1068
- Although the Disney version is the most popular in America, hundreds of versions of the Cinderella story exist. This resource provides lessons, in which students define the major differences in the characteristics of the heroine (e.g., meek, assertive) in a variety of Cinderella tales.

“Planning Story Characters Using Interactive Trading Cards,” Grades 3-5

- ORC Lesson # 6440
- This lesson uses trading cards of fictional characters to support students' literacy development in writing narrative texts. Students begin by exploring popular picture books, noting how authors develop the characters in these stories.

“Bright Morning: Exploring Character Development in Fiction,” Grades 4-6

- ORC Lesson# 1337
- This lesson teaches characterization through *Sing Down the Moon* by Scott O'Dell; however, any fictional text (even picture books) that all students have read or heard can be adapted to fit the lesson. Thinking about how an author writes to make a character "come alive" in a piece of literature is the focus of this lesson.

“What a Character!” Grades 4-6

- ORC Lesson# 2305
- This lesson features methods in which students learn strategies for developing strong characters in their own writing. Students are guided through a series of pre-writing activities as they complete a character sketch.

“Lights, Camera, Action: Interviewing a Book Character,” Grades 4-7

- ORC Lesson# 2838
- During a novel study, students closely examine the different characters in the text by keeping journal entries, meeting for group discussions, and using graphic organizers. This extensive character examination is designed to help them to prepare a final project that involves creating an interview-style television show.

“Beyond the Story: A Dickens of a Party,” Grades 6-8

- ORC Lesson# 2758
- To complete this lesson, students are invited to attend a 19th Century party playing the role of a character from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. To play this role, students must understand the values and customs Dickens' characters represented in Victorian society.

“Story Character Homepage,” Grades 6-8

- ORC Lesson# 1389
- This lesson effectively combines collaborative work, deep analysis of a character, and integration of technology. Working in small groups, students analyze a character from a piece of fiction and create a website to represent their interpretation of that character.

“Truman Capote: Other Voices, Other Rooms,” Grades 6-8

- ORC Lesson# 1189
- Character development is the primary focus of this lesson, which uses Truman Capote's short story, "A Christmas Memory," as the basis for a character study. Teachers initiate the activity by leading a discussion about the plot and the main character of the short story.

Character Development

“Press Conference for *Bud, Not Buddy*,” Grades 6-8

- ORC Lesson# 3814
- This lesson can be used after the reading of *Bud, Not Buddy*, by Christopher Paul Curtis. The lesson encourages students to use higher-level thinking skills, and asks them to examine different character perspectives. Students demonstrate comprehension of the story by actively involving themselves in group and whole-class discussions. Information about the author contributes to their understanding of historical fiction. By further analyzing the characters in preparation for a class “press conference,” students better understand the characters’ impact in the story. The development and responses to critical-thinking questions leads to deeper understanding of the story.

Other Internet Resources

- “Using Picture Books to Teach Characterization in Writing Workshop” Grades 3-5
 - http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view_printer_friendly.asp?id=101
- “Characterization” by Manning, Maryann. Look Smart Article, May 2001, Teaching PreK-8
 - http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3666/is_200105/ai_n8935272
- “Language Arts: Writers Invent Character and Point of View” Grades 6-12
 - <http://www.howard.k12.md.us/langarts/Curriculum/character.htm>
- “Primary and Derivative Attitudes and Ideals” – Leland L. Bernard
 - http://spartan.ac.brocku.ca/~lward/Bernard/1926/1926_27.html
- “Character”
 - http://www.wakakirri.com/waka_storyguide_character.html
- “Understanding Character” This site has downloadable PDF files:
 - Character Analysis Graphic Organizer
 - Character Analysis T-Shirt Project Instructions
 - Character Analysis T-Shirt Rubric
 - <http://content.scholastic.com/browse/lessonplan.jsp?id=39>
- “The Art of Storytelling: Who Are Your Main Characters?” *Because of Mama: Creating a Short Film*
 - <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~shortfilm/process/characters.html>
- “Creating Original Characters, Themes, and Visual Metaphors for Your Digital Short Film”
 - <http://www.peachpit.com/articles/article.asp?p=174318&rl=1>

Jesse Owens • Follow-up Activities

Research these historical figures:

- Adolph Hitler
 - Where is Berlin, Germany?
 - What happened to Berlin during World War II?
 - How did Hitler’s Germany treat athletes who were non-Aryan during the 1936 Olympics?
- Jesse Owens
 - Did Jesse Owens ever work as a delivery boy?
 - Does the tall tale reflect Jesse Owens’s true feelings about being an Olympic athlete?

Categorize figurative language from the “Jesse Owens” episode:

- Jesse kept running even though his feet felt like heavy rocks and his arms like metal sledge hammers.
- Jesse moved so fast he was able to pick up each member of the boss’s family and take them out of harms way.
- Jesse moved like a blur, then like wildfire, he rocketed out like a missile. [He] picked up speed and moved like lightning.