

Unit 2

Characterization

Overview

In this unit, students build upon previous knowledge to create vivid characters. Students will be able to use photos as effective starting points. Students will learn to create robust characters and senerios .



Essential Questions

- How does reading the works of other writers help me improve my writing skills?
- How does a well-developed character and realistic dialogue add to the overall feel and quality of a written work?

Essential Learning Outcomes

- Students build upon previous knowledge to create vivid characters
- Students will be able to use photos as effective starting points
- Students will learn the proper format for dialogue

Unit Resources

[Characterization S.T.E.A.L Handout](#)

[Whose Shoes Are These? Activity](#)

[Maya Angelou Reading and Activity](#)

Video

[Characterization Study Video Playlist](#)

Start With a Video Clip

Cartoon clips or a movie can be a fun way to start off a unit on characterization. If you have the time, a great film to watch is "The Breakfast Club" - it's a great way to talk about stereotypes, and each of the main characters provides plenty of content for a character analysis.

Old vintage cartoon clips can be fun too - check out "Tom & Jerry" and have students compare and contrast the two characters. What are their defining characteristics? How do they learn about each character?

Brainstorm as a class the character traits of the cast of Sesame Street. What words would they use to describe Oscar the Grouch, Cookie Monster, Big Bird... how are these characters developed? Or you could use the characters from The Simpsons.

Pixar movie shorts are also fantastic - analyze the old man in Geri's Game or compare and contrast the mentor and the student in Lifted.

Characterization S.T.E.A.L.

Without a clear sense of who a character is, what they value, and what they're afraid of, the reader will be unable to appreciate the significance of plot events, and your story will have less impact. Like real people, fictional characters have hobbies, pets, histories, ruminations, and obsessions. These characteristics inform how a character reacts to and feels about the things that happen to them. It's essential to your novel that you understand all aspects of your characters so that you are equipped to understand how they may react under the pressures of events they encounter.

While reading a short story, ask students to pick a character to analyze and really explore as we read. Using the acronym S.T.E.A.L, students look for what the character SAYS, what they THINK, their EFFECT on others, their ACTIONS, and their LOOKS. It's an easy way to keep track of the ways we learn about characters.

Characterization S.T.E.A.L

Speech

What does the character say? How do they say it? What is their tone? What does their choice of words tell you?

Thoughts

What does the character think? What do we learn from their thoughts & ideas?

Effects

What is this character's effect on others? How do they interact with others?

Actions

What does this character do? How do they behave? What can we learn from their actions?

Looks

What does this character look like? What can we learn from how they present themselves to others?

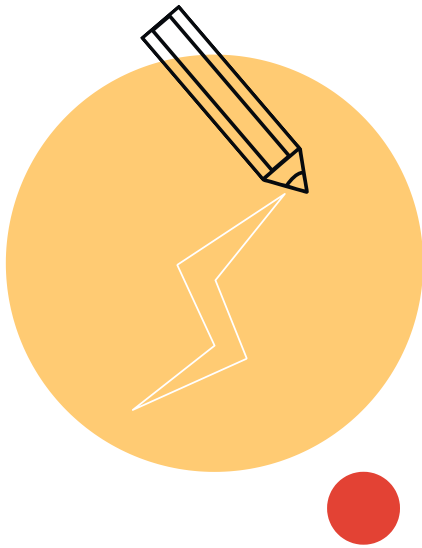
Whose shoes are these?



Use pairs of shoes as a starting point for students to develop a character. You can use these images, or if you are really feeling ambitious, you can gather some shoes from home or from colleagues. Search for a selection of shoes to represent people of all ages and walks of life... the more varied and eclectic, the better! Post the pictures or display the shoes and then have students pick a pair to analyze.

Ask students to create the character that the shoe belongs to - here are a few questions you could use to get started.

- What's your character's name? How old are they? Where were they born? Where do they live?
- What do they look like? What is important to them in terms of their appearance?
- What is their favorite food? Hobby? Sports? Skills?
- What is their greatest fear? Their greatest love? Biggest regret? Future dreams?
- What would they change about their life if they could?
- Introvert or extrovert? Pessimist or optimist?
- Best quality? Worst quality? Pet peeves?
- Who do they love? What is important to them?
- What do other people think of them? How do they relate to others?
- What are five words others would use to describe them?



Read

And Still I Rise (1978)
BY MAYA ANGELOU

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

*Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.*

*Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.*

*Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?*

*Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.*

*You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.*

*Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?*

*Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.*

*Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.*

The Creative Process of the Legendary Maya Angelou

By Jill Krasny at Inc.com

<https://www.inc.com/jill-krasny/maya-angelou-creative-writing-process.html>

Maya Angelou was many things--a waitress, a teacher, an activist, and a playwright, to name a few--but the 86-year-old, who quietly passed in her home this morning, was most renown for her accomplishments as an author. And she was a prolific one at that. Though she picked up the profession late in life, at 41, she managed to produce six volumes of autobiography and six books of poetry. (The latter catapulted her to the national stage in 1993, when she read "On the Pulse of Morning" at Bill Clinton's inauguration.)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, which recounts her harrowing upbringing in the segregated South, remains a fixture on high school reading lists and among the most powerful accounts of what it meant to be black (and a woman) in that era. That time wasn't easy, but with her lyrical voice, at times raw and irreverent, Angelou made the telling of it appear effortless. Angelou tried just about everything from Calypso singing to acting and directing. But she was strict about her writing conditions, and notorious for craving alone time to think, so much so that she wrote in near-empty hotel rooms, with no art on the walls to distract her.

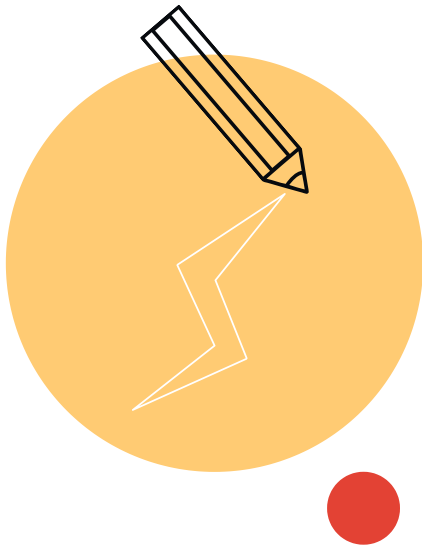
Here, in no particular order, are a few of those eccentric rules.

Early to rise, early to work. Angelou was an early bird who was known to rise at 5 a.m. As she told *The Paris Review*, "I leave my home at six, and try to be at work by six-thirty."

Always keep a Bible on hand. "The language of all the interpretations, the translations, of the Judaic Bible and the Christian Bible, is musical, just wonderful," Angelou told *The Paris Review* in the same interview. Also on hand were a thesaurus, a dictionary and a bottle of sherry. Though she demurred on whether it sparked her creativity, Angelou admitted she might have a sip early, at 6:15 a.m., but usually partook no later than 11 a.m., when she was deep in her work.

Stay quiet. Not unlike many great thinkers, Angelou needed to hear herself think when she was writing. "You have to get to a very quiet place inside yourself," she advised on *Oprah.com*. "And that doesn't mean that you can't have noise outside. I know some people who put jazz on, loudly, to write."

Always work in hotel rooms. At about 5:30 in the morning, she would go there to write, despite owning a rather large house. She kept a room in every town she lived in, too. As she told *The Paris Review*: "To write, I lie across the bed, so that this elbow is absolutely encrusted at the end, just so rough with callouses."



Activity

Listen to Dr. Maya Angelou as she describes the challenges she faced as a writer and the process behind creating literature.

Watch Unit 2 Video Clips

<https://youtu.be/wVpRt1sxaM8>

<https://youtu.be/YOrSs4ExwG0>

Maya Angelou said “I’ve learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way s/he handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights.”

Tell a story in which a character has to deal with one, two, or all three of these scenarios. How does your character respond?