Character Traits

Teacher Talk

What: (What are character traits, emotions and motives?): Characters are the people or animals in a story. When looking at characters, notice details about how they look, feel and act. The details that tell about their personalities are called character traits. Identifying and understanding characters’ traits, emotions and motives help the reader understand the characters.

Why: (How does it help you as a reader?): Knowing about the character helps the reader understand the story better by making personal connections with the characters.

When: (When is it used during reading?) When you want to understand a character and their behavior, you look for details about the character in the text.

What does research tell us about this strategy?
“Student responses to character development are important.” Taylor, B (2002, July) “Readers who are unaware of structure do not approach a text with any particular plan of action (Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980). Consequently, they tend to retrieve information in a seemingly random way. Students who are aware of text structure organize the text as they read, and they recognize and retain the important information it contains.” A Research Agenda for Improving Reading Comprehension, RAND Reading Study Group, p. 40, 2002

What is expected at this level when using the strategy?
Students discuss and present dramatic interpretations of character traits, feelings, relationships and changes.

What prior knowledge or schema do the students need to have?
• Ability to recognize supporting details
• Some knowledge of story elements and how they unfold in the story.

What are the cautions and tips when teaching this strategy?
• Students usually find it easier to find the character trait before identifying the character motive.
• The word labels for emotions must be a part of the student’s listening and speaking vocabulary.
• Students make personal connections to analyze character traits.
• The text must be an appropriate reading level to enable students to search the text for information to support their thinking.
## Expectations

### Character Traits, Emotions, Motives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Introduced – I</th>
<th>Grade Developed – D</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
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Character Traits, Emotions, Motives

Introduction

Material: Character Traits Definition Chart (PDR-CD)

- Prepare and display the Character Traits Definition Chart shown below. A blackline master is also provided on the PDR-CD. The teacher should enlarge the chart, create their own example of the chart, or make a transparency to show the students.
- Use the definition chart to introduce the strategy. Name and define the strategy, including why and when to use the strategy during reading. (Refer to Teacher Talk)
- Display and review the Character Traits Definition Chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Ears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple Collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice Dog</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Character traits tell or show you how the characters (people or animals) in the story look, feel, and act.

Think about...
- how a character looks.
- what character says or thinks.
- what the character does.
- how the character feels.

Key Phrases
- The characters in the story were ________.
- I think the ________ was _______ because_______.
- ________ reminds me of _________.

- When discussing the definition and key phrases use an example of a situation or familiar book to activate prior knowledge about the strategy prediction.

Model

Materials: Character Traits Definition Chart (PDR-CD)

- 4 pictures from text that provides character traits such as: looks, facial expressions, body language, etc

- Review the Character Traits Definition Chart with the students.
- I now know that how a character looks and feels helps me understand a story better. Sometimes I can get information about a character from a picture.
- Hold up the first picture you chose to share with the students.
- I am going to see if I can tell anything about the character in this picture by the clues I see in the picture.
- Think aloud to model for the students. Be sure to include the physical appearance, facial expressions, and body language of the character. Some pictures may have
the characters doing an action that tells you something about the character. There may be another character that tells you something about the main character in the picture you are modeling. *This picture did tell me a lot about the character. What I learned about the character helps me better understand the whole picture.*

- Repeat this process at least 2 more times using the other pictures of characters you have chosen.

- **Now I want you to give it a try.** Hold up the last picture you chose to share with the students.

- **Look at the character in this picture. Take a minute and think about what the picture tells you about this character.**

- After the students have had a minute to think about the character’s traits, ask students to turn to a partner and **stop to talk.**

- **Turn to your partner and say, I think ________ was ______ because ______.**

- Allow students just enough time to complete their talk. Ask several students to share with the class what they shared with their partner.

**Activity 2**

**Materials:**  
Character Traits Definition Chart (PDR-CD)  
Picture book including 3-5 opportunities to model character traits

- Select 3-5 appropriate places to stop in the text to model character traits using think aloud.

- Before reading aloud use sticky notes to mark stopping points in the text to model character traits. Also, choose a picture from the text that will provide evidence of the traits of the character for discussion.

- **I have learned that pictures can tell me about a character. Look at the character in one of the pages of this book.** Discuss the traits observed in the picture. Use the character trait key phrases from the definition chart when you are modeling.

- **Today as I read, listen closely for the character traits that tell us about the character.**

- **Turn to your partner and say, I think ________ was ______ because ______.**

- Allow student just long enough to share character traits. Ask students to wind up their talk, and allow several students to share character traits they discussed with their partners.

- **Pictures can give us information about a character, and now we know that words tell us about a character too. Words can tell us how a character acts and why they feel the way they do. Ask student to share new traits they know after reading the text.**

**Activity 3**

**Materials:**  
Character Traits Definition Chart (PDR-CD)  
The Three Little Pigs 3-5 opportunities to model character traits
• If students are not familiar with the story of The Three Little Pigs, use another story that is familiar to students for the next part of this activity.

• Link the lesson by reviewing how pictures and words can give us information about character traits.

• **Now I want you to think about a character you all know.** Ask students to close their eyes. **Think about the story of the three little pigs that you have heard read to you many times. Think about the third little pig. In your mind, think about what the third little pig did in the story. What did he build his house out of? Did it take him longer than the other two pigs to build his house? When the wolf blew down the houses of the first and second little pig, what did the third little pig do? After thinking about the third little pig, what do you know about him?**

• After the students have had a few seconds to think, have them stop to talk with their partner. **Turn to your partner and say, I think the third little pig was ________ because _________.**

• Allow students only enough time to complete their talk. Ask students to wind up their talk, and allow a few students to share what they know about the third little pig. (He was smart. He was a hard worker. He was caring because he shared his house with the other two little pigs.) Have students provide evidence for their thinking.

• **Repeat this activity using little pigs 1, 2 and the wolf.**

**Guided Practice**

**Activity 1**

**Materials:** Text with one main character  
**Character Trait Graphic Organizer Chart** (PDR-CD)

• **We can learn about a character by pictures and words in the text. Today I am going to share with you an easy way of writing down the traits of a character. You will use this graphic organizer later on. It can help you organize the information you have learned about the character. You might use the information to draw a conclusion about a character or to organize your thoughts before writing about a character.**

• Display the **Character Trait Graphic Organizer Chart** and selected text for reading.

• **As we look at the web we can write the name of the character we want to know about in the middle of the web.** Write the name of the character in the middle of the web.

• **After reading our story, we will write character traits about _________ on each spoke of the web. As I read the story, listen closely to learn about _____ _____.**

• Read the story.

• Refer back to the web. Ask students to turn and **stop to talk** with their partner. **Turn to your partner and say, I think ________ was ________ because ________.**
• Allow students just long enough to complete their talk. Ask student to share their thinking. As they share, write their responses on the spokes of the web. Have the students give evidence to support their thinking.

• Now I want you to stop to talk about the character traits. Turn to your partner and say, I think _____ looks ______. Ask a few students to share and prove their thinking.

• Repeat using the key phrases below.
  
  \[
  \begin{align*}
  & \text{I think} \quad \text{feels} \quad \text{_____.} \\
  & \text{I think} \quad \text{acted like} \quad \text{_____.} \\
  & \text{I have/have not felt like} \quad \text{________.}
  \end{align*}
  \]

**Activity 2**

- **Materials:** Character Traits and Evidence Graphic Organizer Chart (PDR-CD)
- **Text –** The Three Little Pigs or Familiar Text

• Yesterday we used a web to help us organize our thoughts about a character. You found evidence to prove your thinking about the character. Today we are going to write what we know about the character or their traits, and write the evidence to prove our thinking.

• Display the Character Traits and Evidence Graphic Organizer Chart and explain to students which character they will focus on today.

• We will use the Big Bad Wolf from *The Three Little Pigs* as our character. It is our job to come up with evidence to prove that the Big Bad Wolf is truly bad and scary. Turn to your partner and say, the Big Bad Wolf was __________ because __________.

• Allow students enough time to share their thinking with their partner. Ask several students to share their thinking and discuss.

• As the students share their thoughts, write them in the character trait boxes.

• Now let’s share how you know these traits. Discuss the evidence that proves the traits listed on the graphic organizer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Trait</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dark brown and furry</td>
<td>Have seen pictures of the Big Bad Wolf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes to eat pork</td>
<td>He wanted to eat the 3 little pigs and pigs are pork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>He is not nice to animals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Do we have evidence that the Big Bad Wolf is really bad and scary? Could we convince someone that he is? Turn to your partner and say, I think the Big Bad Wolf was bad and scary because __________.
Shared Reading

Materials: Big book with one main character
Character Trait Web Graphic Organizer Chart or Handout (PDR-CD)

• Today as I read, I want you to tune in and think about the characters in the story. After reading the story, we are going to talk about and write the character traits on our graphic organizer.

Note: This activity can be done as a whole class, or students may work with partners or small groups.

• Introduce the book and identify the character you will describe later. Read the story aloud. Ask students to give it a try.

• Turn to your partner and say, The character _____ is _____ because _______.

• Allow students enough time to discuss the character, and then allow several students to share. Display the Character Trait Web Graphic Organizer, and demonstrate how to use the web to organize the character traits of the character that they have identified. The students may work in pairs or in small groups.

• Students may draw or write the traits they discussed with their partner. Allow time for students to share their graphic organizers when completed.

Small Group Reading

Materials: Instructional reading level text for small group
Character Traits and Evidence Graphic Organizer Chart or Individual Copies (PDR-CD)

• After completing the guided reading session, ask students to think about one character in the story.

Note: The teacher may model, using think aloud, the character traits of one character or have a group discussion.

• Review the graphic organizer with the students. Turn to your partner and say, the character _______ was _______ because _______.

• Allow students just enough time to discuss their character and allow several to share.

• Complete the graphic organizer as a group or as an independent activity.

Independent Practice

Activity 1

Materials: Familiar texts with main characters on independent reading levels
Student response journals

• Students select a book with a character they can personally connect to.

• The students reread the book and choose a character they think is the most like them.

• The student will use their response journal to draw or write about how the character is like them and why.
Activity 2

Materials: Familiar texts with main characters on independent reading levels
Student response journals

• Students choose a book from guided practice or a big book from shared reading and reread the text. They use their student response journals to draw the graphic organizer and complete it, providing character traits for the character they chose.
• Students can draw or write their responses.

Note: This activity can be used as an independent activity each day, asking students to look at one trait at a time, how the character looks, feels, acts, etc.

A Step Beyond

• Select two characters from the same story or different stories, and share how they are alike and different. Use a Venn Diagram to compare the story variants.
• Use their student response journal to draw or write the character traits of their best friend and give evidence.
• Select a character from a fairy tale and share the character traits and evidence.
• Have the students pretend a new student has moved into their class. Students share character traits about their new teacher (you) and give evidence for their thinking.
• Students choose a fictional character such as Superman, Cinderella, a pirate, etc. They draw or write about their character trait and give evidence for their thinking. This can be done in their student response journal or graphic organizer. These could be displayed as a class bulletin board, “We Have the Evidence”.
• Have the students take a character and see if they can change the opinion most people have of that character. For example, most students would think of Goldilocks as being a nice little girl. They may share evidence otherwise:
  • She broke into the house of the three little bears.
  • She ate their food and broke their chairs.
  • She ran away without explaining why she was there.
### Character Traits / Emotions / Motives Across the Curriculum

| Math                        | • Discuss the characters and their traits that appear in a story problem.  
                             | • Create characters out of shapes, such as a triangle, and discuss their traits. |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Science                    | • Discuss issues such as pollution, water conservation, etc. and how people feel differently about these issues.  
                             | • Discuss motives of others for protecting the environment.                  |
| Social Studies             | • Discuss character traits of historical figures and how the traits influenced their behavior. Example: Abraham Lincoln |
| Other                      | • Art: Examine works of art and have students discuss character traits depicted.  
                             | • Music: Listen to a composition. Have the students predict how the composer felt when composing the selection. |