Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2010 Volume II: The Art of Reading People: Character, Expression, Interpretation

Forging Life: Characterization through Prose

Curriculum Unit 10.02.04
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Introduction

Students spend years reading and analyzing fictional texts for character, but they spend almost no time on the act of how to create character in fictional prose. The unit, Forging Life, is designed to help students learn how to create fictional characters "on the page", i.e., in prose fiction of their own making. The unit focuses on several specific methods authors use to develop a fictional character as well as the patterns in which those methods are used to represent the character as a whole. In other words, the unit centers on how to create bits of character in individual lines, or prose constructions if you prefer, as well as how all those bits (and lines) go together to create the overall character. The unit's overall goal is to help students write characters better in the fiction they produce, rather than just becoming adept at analyzing others' works (though those two goals are not mutually exclusive); as such, the unit's chief method of instruction is through the students' creative exploration of characters they create.

Rationale

Writing fiction can be both one of the most difficult things in the world and one of the easiest. Over the course of the last four years I have taught the art of writing fiction in the Creative Writing department at Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School in New Haven, CT. Working with students who have often never written a piece of fiction before, I have found that the art of fiction has to become the craft of writing. In other words, instructions such as, "write something from your heart" have been exposed as directionless and vague when given to a group of teenagers-you get either terrifyingly dramatic hallway break-up stories or depressingly lost looks as students stare at blank pages. Teaching fiction to teenagers, who are sometimes reluctant writers, and always self-conscious, must be a step-by-step crafting process. Writing, viewed as a craft, can be forged through concrete stages and procedures that still allow immense creative freedom while imposing order and guidance on the process. One of the recurring difficulties for students in this crafting process has been the creation and interplay of fictional characters with depth. The development of this unit is driven by the need to demystify the effective creation of characters and characterization in the works of fiction written by my

students.

There are countless writing manuals, by authors of note and of obscurity, which touch upon the necessary elements of character and characterization. Such texts usually offer up anecdotal stories about muses striking and midnight inspirations, and then provide some general exercises for developing characters (write about a stranger, fill out a police report, etc). Not to discredit these sorts of text (I own quite a few myself and have become rather protectively attached to the notions some advance), but they are often useless to a new writer when it comes to the construction and reshaping of the actual prose. Too often the prospective student (on the advice of such manuals) fills out fact sheets, writes detailed character backgrounds, and hacks away at every sentence, trying to squeeze a little more characterization in, only to find that the characters in the prose are awkward, unbalanced, and flat.

This unit is an attempt to fill in the missing pieces of typical books on writing fiction. The unit utilizes the PROPEL methodology created by Project Zero, but the overall guiding vision for its construction comes from my practical experience as a writer of fiction. Over the years of study, creation, revision, and publication, I have found that success or failure lies in the construction of the prose-not in exercises or anecdotes, nor in passion or vision. The word-by-word labor of crafting prose is king in the writing game. Unfortunately, it is just that word-by-word instruction that is missing from most texts dealing with the creation of fiction (and thus characters and characterization). In teaching my students, I have become painfully aware of the price I have paid to develop the instincts for the working of prose; I would spare them some of the years of self-instruction, study, and reflection I found necessary because no practical guide existed. Oddly, it was when I became a teacher that I discovered that I had essentially pushed myself through a version of Bloom's taxonomy, from simple facts to advanced levels of conception and self realization (or what Marzano and Kendall refer to as a "self-system" [1]), as regards the act of creating fiction. As such, the general framework of Bloom's taxonomy, moving from knowledge through analysis to creation, is a theoretical support for the unit's sequence.

Overview

Focusing on character and characterization, the unit brings these subjects down to the level of how to craft prose word-by-word to produce a desired effect in the reader (or range of effects in a range of readers). To achieve a systematic formula for the successful creation of prose about character, the unit brings together concepts outlined by Janet Burroway, Leonora Woodman, and other writers. The unit is composed of three major parts (preceded by an initiating section) and is designed to last between four to six weeks.

The overall structure of the unit is guided by its chief a strategy that pairs a process-oriented portfolio with daily writing workshops. Too often, the portfolio in a classroom acts "merely as storage or final evaluation device", [2] but in a creative writing classroom, such limited use of a portfolio is almost deadly to the educational objectives. Writing is an art and therefore dependent on artistic processes. Thorough use of the portfolio as a pedagogical tool, one that establishes a formal discourse between teacher and student through mutual feedback, as well as a repository of work facilitates a master-apprentice relationship with students where the students become, "constructors of knowledge...[in accordance with] the psychological and educational research of...John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky." [3] .

The process-oriented portfolio focuses on three major aspects of the students' writing in the unit: production,

perception, and reflection. This unit on characterization in prose is designed to help student writers tackle authentic problems that face professional writers, and as such, the process-oriented portfolio is designed to emulate real-world writing endeavors that, "often take a long period of time, require attention to many steps along the way, can be solved in multiple ways, and build on previous understandings". [4] Production, perception and reflection, as applied to in this unit via the portfolio become the channel through which content is delivered rather than just assessment aspects of students' performance. As these aspects are critical to the teaching of this unit, each is discussed below briefly.

Production in this unit, and portfolio, is the act of creative writing as applied to characterization in prose fiction. The unit uses various types of analytical and reflective writing, but the role of production (creative writing) is the one it uses most. It would be easy to let analysis and reflection overwhelm the self-constructed student creative writing; however, authentic creative writing is "at the heart of artistry" and "reflection and perception...become more meaningful when they grow out of the student's own work." [5] The central role of production demands the large amount of time devoted to student creative writing in the lesson plans. During the unit the students engage in creative writing (focused on characterization) almost everyday for the majority of each class meeting.

Though production is critical, perception, as a role in the portfolio, is equally important. It is through the students' study of published writers' works (and eventually their own and their peers') that perception becomes a part of this unit and helps to develop the students' own writing. Studying published authors' works to examine how they tackled characterization "enriches students' experience of the world and their art making" as the students learn "to recognize new options and can make use of expanded visions in their own work." [6] At various points within the unit, the students' critical focus on published authors is shifted to peers' work and their own writing, allowing the students to become their own critics.

The final aspect of the portfolio used in this unit is reflection. In many ways it is reflection that truly helps student writers to enrich their own writing (though it relies on both production and perception). It is in the act of reflection that "students take an active role, not only in construction their own understanding, but also in demonstrating how their understanding has evolved over time." [7] Through reflection on the characterization that students create in their own prose, students become aware of how they have or have not applied the concepts gleaned from studying each others' and published authors' works. Throughout the unit both formal and informal reflection are implemented through process logs, discussion, and critiques.

The three aspects of the portfolio come together in daily writing workshops that integrate all three. While curriculum is often laid out in sequential arrangements, learning is often recursive. A student may very well learn D before A as opposed to a orderly sequence of A, B, C, and then D. The daily integration of production, perception and reflection helps daily writing workshops to create an environment where there are "two sets of curricula...one for the whole class, and one for each individual student". [8] The writing workshops allow each student multiple opportunities to engage with the different aspects of the unit's teaching.

Though the structural design of the unit offers recurring opportunities to learn about how to characterize when writing prose, it does have a specific sequence of educational objectives. While learning is not necessarily sequential, it is organizationally advantageous to present the concepts, elements, and exercises in a sequential manner; otherwise, the range of particular objectives that contribute to the overall goal of students effectively characterizing could be overwhelming to both students and teachers.

The particular objectives of the unit, as they appear sequentially in the lesson plans, are: 1) to explore aspects

of characterization and fiction, 2) to create rudimentary character sketches based on observations of people, 3) to reflect on their prior knowledge and experience with on characterization, 4) to know five methods of characterizing in fiction, 5) to characterize their own characters using each method, 6) to reflect on how different characterizations are different, 7) to know three methods of characterizing through modulations in prose, 8) to characterize their own characters using the three methods of modulating prose, 9) to reflect on how different prose styles affect characterization and why, 10) to understand how character is a pattern in a prose sequence, 11) to craft stories using various techniques of characterization, and 12) to reflect on how characterization affects story and how their facility with it has changed.

Obviously, the range of particular educational objectives could become unwieldy quite quickly. Certain objectives may take longer than others to implement. In an effort to guide student development and help present the unit, the unit is divided into three major parts: elements of characterization (content), prose style of characterization (form), and the interplay of the content and form as pattern within a story (content and form). Each section, along with its corresponding objectives, can be expanded or shortened for different classes.

Before the unit's major sections begin however, an initiating section introduces the focus of characterization in prose. The purpose of this section goes beyond simple introduction though. It acts as a means of authentically evoking the students' interest, prior knowledge, and writing. As education scholars Robert Marzano and John Kendall noted in The New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, "it is the interaction of…attitudes, beliefs, and emotions that determines both motivation and attention." [9] In other words, an initiating activity needs to go way beyond simple a verbal introduction of concepts to be successful.

As a successful initiating activity to characterization in fiction, students practice observing people as characters. Taken from countless writer's experience, including my own, one of the best ways to "understanding people is through observation and… knowledge of others"; [10] it connects writing to life, one's self, and the world. To achieve maximum effect, the observation of people should be done in an environment that is outside the classroom, and if possible, the school grounds. The students' observations of strangers on the street, in a government building, or a shopping plaza are all excellent venues for the initiation. These unfamiliar locations and subjects of observation help cue the students' curiosity, sense of purpose, and encourage them to experiment and take risks.

Wherever the location of the initiation turns out to be, students are instructed to write down simple characteristics and draw some basic inferences for the at least three to five of the people they observe. Before the students begin writing, a short list of suggestions given by the teacher help students to focus (characteristics can include height, dress, hair color, movement, etc; inferences might include the subjects' moods, personalities, occupations, and so on). At the start of the initiation, the teacher also encourages students to write openly and go wherever they want with their observations. Depending on the prior knowledge of students, the teacher can review fundamentals of good character design: credibility, complexity, purpose, and change as well. [11]

At the conclusion of the initiating activity, the students discuss what it was like to observe people, what they noticed, and how it made them think. As the unit progresses, the students will be using these observations and character sketches almost daily, so an intensive period of discussion and reflection on the activity is advised. The students are encouraged to explore what they already know about writing characters in fiction, types of characters, ways of characterizing, the role of character in fiction, etc.

Ultimately, students use these observations and character sketches as the raw material for the characterization lessons later in the unit. These character sketches and the students' subsequent writing exercises will be a primary source of reflection in student journal writing (hereafter termed process-logs). In this way, the students are reconnected to the evocative power of the initiating exercise. An optional extension to the unit is to repeat the initiating exercise at various points in the unit to re-cue students' inspiration. A teacher can bring students a new location, have them look for certain characteristics, or focus on a particular method of characterization as the students observe in the optional re-initiations.

After the introduction, the first major section of the unit introduces students to five specific methods of characterization in fiction. These five methods focus on the content of the words used in fiction. For example, students examine the different ways to characterize in fiction, such as when an author uses a phrase like "he sneered at them for their weakness"(action) as opposed to "he said, 'you feeble toads'"(speech).

Depending on which commentator on the craft of writing fiction you read, there are different numbers of methods authors use to characterize their characters; this unit uses five of those listed by Janet Burroway in Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft. These methods deal with the nature of the content of the prose: actions, dialogue, thoughts, descriptions, and setting. [12] The last method, concerning characterization and setting, is one of the most accessible "economical means of sketching a character" [13] and can be used as alternate starting point/focus for students having difficulty. These five are not a perfect list or are they intended to be, but they do roughly cover the most common ways to characterize in contemporary fiction.

This section of the unit utilizes creative experimentation where the students are asked to characterize a person or character in multiple ways (e.g. through setting, or dialog, or description, etc). Students use their original character sketches from the initiating activity as raw material for these experiments in characterization. Students should be encouraged at this point to begin playing around with creating a "book" of characters to work with in the upcoming short story they will write. A book of characters, a collection of various experiments with characterization and different character sketches, acts as a creative research tool for writers and will help to build student enthusiasm as they begin to plan out (brainstorm) for the stories they will eventually write through the unit.

There are several lessons within this section as each of the five methods of characterizing through content is explored and experimented with, but each bares a structural similarity to the rest. Every lesson begins by examining the work of a published author, a short lecture--discussion about the method under examination in the author's work, and then proceeds to student production of their own creative writing. Each session is then followed by a period of critique and reflection.

For example, the lesson on characterization and setting might begin with the examination of a passage from a best-selling novel, like Jim Butcher's Grave Peril. The novel, about a detective-wizard, is written in the pulpy, fast-passed, hard-boiled detective vein.

The novel opens, "There are reasons I hate to drive fast. For one, the Blue Beetle, the mismatched Volkswagon bug that I putter around in, rattles and groans dangerously at anything above sixty miles…As a rule, when I drive, I drive very carefully and sensibly. Tonight was an exception to the rule." [14] At first students might think this passage has no setting, but the teacher can ask the class where the character is, what is he doing, what objects are described, what do the objects tell us about the character, and so. From student answers, the teacher can draw out that the main character is poor, out of place, involved with danger, not afraid, etc.

After this examination and critique, the teacher might review the specifics of how setting affects character: weather, objects, activity, time, culture, etc. The teacher can review another passage from the novel, or one from something completely different. The focus in the lesson is on how setting characterizes, not on individual works (though examplars are critical). Once the work has been examined, discussed and outlined, the students are instructed to choose one of the character sketches they made during the initiation and to apply setting as a characterizing element.

At the conclusion of this lesson, the teacher asks students to reflect in their process-logs on what they accomplished and how their writing changed from the character sketch to the exercise.

All the lessons in the first section follow a format similar to the example given for setting and characterization.

Next, the second major section examines and applies different techniques of prose style to affect characterization. The prose style of a piece creates rhythms, perspective, and dramatic structure in a reader's mind at the level of form, that is, beneath the content. It shapes how a reader engages with the content. Where the five methods deal with the characterizing content in fiction, prose style is concerned with the form. Though style is something beyond just linguistic tricks, learning particular aspects "allows…[students] a firmer control of their own writing". [15] This section focuses on the very basic aspects of sentence length, arrangement, and complexity as aspects of prose style that affect characterization.

This section also uses creative experimentation where the students are asked to characterize a person or character in multiple ways (e.g. short sentences, long sentences, simple and complex). The lessons in this section proceed in a similar way to the first section. There is a critical examination of authentic works that deal with the concept the class is examining, then a period of student-centered production of their own writing, and finally an act of reflection. As this section goes forward, students are encouraged again to create a "book" of characters to work with in the upcoming short story they will write.

In the second section, the teacher emphasizes a number of things about sentence length, arrangement, and complexity that usually escape students. As different works are examined at the opening of each class, the teacher highlights the many possible purposes for various prose styles and their potential effect upon a range of readers.

Regarding the length of sentences, the teacher should discuss how longer sentences can produce a flowing feeling that might help characterize a character's internal calm, or how a longer sentence might be used to convey a character's sense of exhaustion, or even how a longer sentence might help add to the grandeur of character's thought; the number of possible reasons and effects of using longer sentences is virtually unlimited, so the important thing is to convey multiple reasons so that students begin to have a sense for possibility. As the presentation moves forward, the teacher bridges the examination of sentence lengths and their effects to the students. The teacher also examines shorter sentences and then the effect of mixing short and long sentences. During this lecture-discussion stage, the teacher continually asks for student perceptions about the concepts.

When the topic of sentence arrangement arises, the teacher should highlight how most, "English sentences flow from subject to verb to any objects" and the five major sentence patterns. [16] The importance of the primary and ultimate position in a sentence is discussed. The teacher can illustrate through excerpted passages how a sentence that begins with a large number of object might predispose a reader to think a certain way about a character's action, or how an adverbial modifier in the primary position might undercut the character's own perception of events (thus characterizing the character as one who misperceives.) Again,

the number of reasons and effects for various sentence arrangements is near limitless, so the crucial thing is to provide students with a multitude of possibilities. Again, during this lecture-discussion, the teacher continually bridges the questioning to the students, helping them develop a sense for sentence arrangement.

As the lessons move on to deal with sentence complexity as a way of affecting characterization, the teacher should touch on how multiple clauses can make a narrator's description of character capture contradictory or complex aspects of character. Depending on the sophistication of the class, the teacher can discuss any number of possible effects due to sentence complexity: how the use of semi-colons can heighten contrasts or insights, how multiple embedded clauses can create a sense of being surrounded or trapped, how the simplest basic clause can sometimes hit harder than the grammatically gymnastic sentence. As with the prose aspects of length and arrangement, the key is to provide students with many ways that sentence complexity can affect a characterizing element.

Finally, in the last section of the unit, the students use the characterization techniques, passages, and their "books" of character that they have developed to create a fictional story of their own; the story should have one round/dynamic character and one flat/static character.

In this section, students learn how different methods of characterization are used in combination to create an overall character. In other words, as the prose sequence informs the reader of various things about a character (actions, words, thoughts, etc.), the reader gets an overall "sense" for that character; the little bits about the person add up. Students examine how, as incremental characterizations builds upon each other, a reader creates a character schema (a mental framework centering around a specific persona) in a way similar to that in which the mind creates a person schema for real people. [17] The way we think about real people is critical to how we think about characters; despite knowing that they are fictional constructs, "...most readers do unshakably continue to apprehend most novel characters as individuals...and as those apprehensions are built up, revised, and articulated, all sorts of extra-textual knowledge...is brought to bear" [18] Students will also learn how that sense of character is changed by various interactions with prose style.

Students practice their construction of characters and prose through a multi-day workshop environment moving through the stages of writing, revision, peer-review, etc. as they write their own fictional stories. It is in this section that students will move from guided practice to truly independent writing. In a sense, the first two sections are primarily there for knowledge acquisition (though the students will be analyzing and creating daily), and this section is where they authentically apply that learning, create with it, and also reflect upon it.

Overall, each of the three major sections relies on the pedagogical principles of scaffolding and Bloom's taxonomy. Each section guides the students as they examine and deconstruct prose, and then, move through the taxonomy to the act of creation.

However, as creative writing is an organic, inspired activity, it is important to balance focused, guided practice with student choice and flexibility. That balance is achieved through limiting the teaching, feedback, and practice to characterization as opposed to other aspects of fiction. The scope of this unit is further limited to looking at two general types of characters in fiction: the flat and the round. By flat, I mean those characters that clearly are meant to serve only as functionaries for the story--the ones that readers don't get too upset by their death, torment, buffoonery, etc. In contrast, round characters are those that are clearly being rendered by the author as whole beings--generally, the ones readers are deeply sympathetic to and disturbed, or overjoyed, by their fortunes. The description and classification of flat and round characters above is grossly simplistic, but it serves to help limit the scope of this section of the unit; if a teacher wishes, they may discuss

how a flat character may also be the protagonist of a fictional .

On the other hand, as seen in the individual lessons for this unit, almost every day focuses on keeping the students writing in a flexible, authentic manner. Teaching the creation of prose at a precise level of word-by-word construction, it would be easy to let the learning become stifling on what Richard Hugo terms "triggering", the spontaneous act of creating the next piece of prose from the last piece. Various strategies are used to continue to pique students' curiosity and interest throughout the unit.

As a resource for this unit, students analyze selections from high-interest, sophisticated texts such as "Jesus' Son" by Dennis Johnson (though any text sufficiently well-written will work). Other contemporary texts might include Fight Club by Chuck Palahniuk or "Nightmares and Dreamscapes" by Stephen King. These texts act as models for the students and are integral to this systematic approach to constructing characters in prose. In analyzing these texts, students also learn how authors use character pattern and story to help different readers, and different learners, interpret the signals given within a prose sequence; this is a critical part of the process, as it weighs heavily upon the nature of the formulaic system they will learn in the construction process.

On the whole, students will learn about the construction of characters in fiction and about how we think about people in life. In the end, fiction is always a simulacrum of reality (at some level); as students work to construct characterizing prose that affects readers in precise ways, they will deepen their own understanding of how people perceive, present and communicate their personal characters to each other, and how this applies to themselves.

Extension

Invariably, there are students and classes that are significantly more advanced than; this section provides some concepts that act as effective extensions for advanced learning.

Character vs. Character: Students examine several excerpts in which two characters are in an adversarial or antagonistic situation. Again students build on their prior knowledge, applying the concept of character schema and characterization style to both characters in the excerpt. Students examine how the schema "respond" to each other line-by-line and how the author creates a sort of game as the two schema react to each other through various "moves" or types of characterization. After examination and analysis, students emulate these excerpts with short writing exercises and characters of their own creation (similar to those created in the first two sections of the unit).

Plot as character: Building off the ideas learned in the Character vs. Character segment, propose the concept that plot is merely a function of character. Students examine and create character schema for the characters of a play and then look at how the plot proceeds out of different interactions of those schema.

Lesson Plans

Section: 1 (Introduction) Lessons: 1-2

The initial lessons are designed to construct a base for the project-based nature of this unit on characterization in fiction writing. This gets the students to begin thinking like writers in regards to characterization (observing, crafting, and reflecting), while also introducing

the basic concepts that the unit will work with. Overall, the introduction is designed as an evocation that will spur student curiosity and motivation

Objectives

- · Students will explore aspects of characterization and fiction
- · Students will create rudimentary character sketches based on observations of people.
- · Students will reflect on their knowledge and experience with the introductory work, discussion, and teaching on characterization

Lesson 1

Introduction to capturing character: Students go on a "character hunt" with cheap cameras (on their phone or with disposables) and a writing journal somewhere in the community. They take pictures of people on the street (at least five) and write as many details and insights as they can about them. Students are advised to look at setting, speech, clothing, action, visual details, emotional clues, etc. Students come back to class and organize their findings, upload photos, etc. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on their own experience of capturing character in their project-process log.

Lesson 2

Introduction to Characterization: Students are asked to discuss experience of "character hunt" and then predict what this has to do with writing, how we might use this, etc. Review the three basic sections of the unit for students: 1) five types of characterization, 2) the role of prose, 3) character as pattern. Students use captured characters from yesterday and fill-in a preliminary characterization form covering all the basic ideas of the course. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on how the day's activity changed how they looked at their "character hunt" from yesterday. At the end of class, inform students they will be on an intensive creative research/learning project on characterization for the next two weeks; explain that they will create detailed character exercises for a story they will create at the end of the creative research/learning period.

Section: 2 (5 Methods) Lessons: 3-10

This section is a writing workshop based around five typical methods taught regarding how to characterize in fiction through the content of the story. Students are reminded that these are building blocks that we must first learn, so we can practice construct various styles of prose later. Aside from the initial lesson, each lesson is based on a workshop model (PROPEL): A short lesson followed by an intensive hands-on workshop in which students (with help of teacher) craft their own projects; finally, each session is concluded with a period of

artistic reflection on the work.

Objectives

- · Students will know five methods of characterizing in fiction.
- · Students characterize their own characters using each method.
- · Students will reflect on how methods of characterizations may vary and how their work relates to peers and exemplars.

Lesson 3

Five Methods of Characterizing Game (content): Teacher acts out each method for a given set of character traits (crazed, fearful, intellectual, etc); students must guess which method of the five (listed on board) the teacher is using and which trait the teacher is attempting to portray. In this way, students become familiar with the five methods of characterization and the basic structure of the game they will be playing. Divide students in to groups of four or five students and give them blank cards for scoring. Explain the game to students, handout a list of potential traits--method combinations for students to pick from hat, and have students play several rounds. Teacher can change groups as needed or have a winner's round near end. Twenty minutes prior to end of class, open the class to discussion; ask students about each method and have them describe in their own words; ask which ones were difficult and why; ask how students will use this in their own stories. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on their own game experience and briefly think about how they might use these in their own stories; students record this in their project--process log.

Lesson 4

Characterization through Dialogue: Teacher outlines how dialogue reveals traits: things said, not said, eluded to, implied, motivations, and results. Teacher and students read dialogue from a short story (a selection from "Jesus' Son" suggested). Teacher analyzes, thinking out loud, how the dialogue characterizes; then bridge the analytical questions to the students. Then take one of the "captured characters" from the initial lesson and write a bit of dialogue for the character focusing on how what is not said characterizes. Once you have modeled this on an overhead or board, have students enter a workshop period where they attempt to do the same. Have students choose one of their characters from the other day and write some dialogue for them that characterize at least two of the traits the student wrote down for that person. Teacher moves about the room helping. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on the dialogue they wrote and briefly think about how they used dialogue to characterize, and what they might do differently next time.

Lesson 5

Characterization through Action: Teacher outlines how actions reveal traits: motivation, how it's done, when it's done, results. Teacher and students read an excerpt from a short story (a selection from "Jesus' Son" suggested). Teacher analyzes, thinking out loud, how the character actions characterize; then bridge the analytical questions to the students. Then take another one of the "captured characters" from the initial lesson and write a passage of actions for that character focusing on how motivations revealed. Once you have modeled this on an overhead or board, have students enter a workshop period in which they attempt to do the same. Have students choose one of their characters from the other day and write some action--passage for

that character that characterize at least two of the traits the student wrote down during the initiation. Teacher moves about the room helping. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on the action--passage they wrote and briefly think about how they used actions to characterize, and what they might do different next time.

Lesson 6

Characterization through Thoughts: Teacher outlines how character thoughts reveal traits: interior realizations, ideas not shared with other characters, private motivations, etc. Teacher and students read an excerpt from a short story (a selection from "Jesus' Son" suggested). Teacher analyzes, thinking out loud, how the character thoughts characterize; then bridge the analytical questions to the students. Then take another one of the "captured characters" from the initial lesson and write a passage that utilizes character thoughts to reveal something about that character. Once you have modeled this on an overhead or board, have students enter a workshop period in which they attempt to do the same. Have them choose one of their characters from the other day and write a passage that uses character thoughts to reveal things about the character that dialogue and action do not. Teacher moves about the room helping. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on the action--passage they wrote and briefly think about how they used thoughts to characterize, and how that is different from other methods of characterization.

Lesson 7

Characterization through Description: Teacher outlines how descriptions reveal traits: stereotypical traits, clothing, manner of movement, physical quirks and special features, etc. Teacher and students read an excerpt from a short story (a selection from "Jesus' Son" suggested). Teacher analyzes, thinking out loud, how the character description characterizes; then bridge the analytical questions to the students. Next, take another one of the "captured characters" from the initial lesson and write a passage that utilizes character description to reveal at least two traits about that character. Once you have modeled this on an overhead or board, have students enter a workshop period during which they attempt to do the same. Have them choose one of their characters from the other day and write a passage that uses character description to reveal things about the character. Teacher moves about the room helping. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on the descriptive passage they wrote and briefly think about how they could use such descriptions with other characters they have worked on.

Lesson 8

Characterization through Setting: Teacher outlines how setting reveals traits: what type of person "hangs out" there, contrasts to setting, associative properties, etc. Teacher and students read an excerpt from a short story (a selection from "Jesus' Son" suggested). Teacher analyzes, thinking out loud, how the character's setting characterizes; then bridge the analytical questions to the students. Next, take another one of the "captured characters" from the initial lesson and write a passage that utilizes character setting to reveal at least two traits about that character. Once you have modeled this on an overhead or board, have students enter a workshop period where they attempt to do the same. Have them choose one of their characters from the other day and write a passage that uses character setting to reveal things about the character. Teacher moves about the room helping. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on the passage they wrote and briefly think about why setting tells so much about characters.

Extension

Some students will invariably move ahead of the class. There are additional ways to characterize that they can

work on such as: 1) characterization through comments by the narrator, and 2) characterization through other characters talking about someone. If a student accomplishes both of these, have them begin using combinations of different techniques.

Section: 3 (The Prose Style) Lessons: 9--12

This section is a writing workshop focusing on three ways to affect characterization through prose style. The five methods learned previously can be thought of as content; the prose style focuses on form. There are countless ways to affect characterization through variations in prose, but this short set of lessons will introduce the concept. Each lesson is based on a workshop model (PROPEL): A short lesson followed by an intensive hands--on workshop during which students (with help of teacher) craft their own projects; finally, each session is concluded with a period of artistic reflection on the work.

Objectives

- · Students will know three methods of characterizing through prose.
- · Students characterize their own characters using each of the three methods.
- · Students will reflect on how different prose styles affect characterization and why.

Lesson 9

Prose Effects; the How--What game: Teacher explains how three basic prose features (length, arrangement/position, and complexity) can affect how a reader interprets the information given them; explain through analogy to the different lenses of a camera. Show students some examples of effects that prose can have, model creating new ones on board, then have students help you create another for each category. When students get the basic concept, have them write down five things about themselves (inform them this will be a shared activity, and they should be mindful of what they write), and put their names at the top. Students then turn in their five things to teacher. Teacher has students draw names out of a box (each name has a technique written under it), and they don't tell anyone whose name they have received. Whichever name the student gets, they are assigned to write about that student/character using the technique listed on that slip, BUT there are rules for each technique in the game (assign different numbers of rules for different class levels). When all students are done, each student reads his or hers; the rest of the class must guess who it is and what technique was used. Teacher keeps score if he or she wants. Students spend last ten to fifteen minutes reflecting on how each technique shapes differently how character is portrayed in the process--log.

Lesson 10

Sentence Length as an Effect: Teacher outlines different ways sentence length can affect a reader's view of the subject of content (in this unit, character): short sentences, a series of short sentences, long sentences, a series of long sentences, combinations of short and long. Teacher and students read an excerpt from a short story collection (a selection from "Jesus' Son" suggested). Teacher analyzes, thinking out loud, how the sentence length affect characterization; then bridge the analytical questions to the students. Then take another one of the "captured characters" from the initial lesson and write a short passage about that character while playing with various sentence lengths. Once you have modeled this on an overhead or board, have students enter a workshop period in which they attempt to do the same. Have them choose one of their

characters from the other day and write two passages for that character; each passage must use a different type of sentence length. Teacher moves about the room helping. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on the sentence length changed how they wrote and experienced the characters. Have them predict how different choices with sentence length might have changed how the character was portrayed.

Lesson 11

Arrangement/Position as an Effect: Teacher outlines different ways sentence arrangement can affect a reader's view of the subject of content (in this unit, character): placing key information at beginning, in the middle, or at the end. Teacher and students read an excerpt from a short story collection (a selection from "Jesus' Son" suggested). Teacher analyzes, thinking out loud, how the sentence arrangements affect characterization; then bridge the analytical questions to the students. Then take another one of the "captured characters" from the initial lesson and write a short passage about that character while playing with various sentence arrangements. Once you have modeled this on an overhead or board, have students enter a workshop period in which they attempt to do the same. Have them choose one of their characters from the initial day and write a passages for that character at least two different ways. Teacher moves about the room helping. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on how the sentence arrangement changed how they wrote and experienced the characters. Have them predict how different choices with sentence arrangement might have changed how the character was portrayed.

Lesson 12

Sentence Complexity as an Effect: Teacher outlines different ways sentence complexity can affect a reader's view of the subject of content (in this unit, character): coordinate clauses, subordinate clauses, restrictive clauses, descriptive clauses, oppositions in complex sentences. Teacher and students read an excerpt from a short story collection (a selection from "Jesus' Son" suggested). Teacher analyzes, thinking out loud, how the sentence arrangements affect characterization; then bridge the analytical questions to the students. Then take another one of the "captured characters" from the initial lesson and write a short passage about that character while playing with complex sentences. Once you have modeled this on an overhead or board, have students enter a workshop period where they attempt to do the same. Have them choose one of their characters from the initial day and write a passage for that character at least two different ways. Teacher moves about the room helping. Students spend last ten minutes reflecting on the sentence complexity changed how they wrote and experienced the characters. Have them predict how different choices with sentence arrangement might have changed how the character was portrayed.

Section: 4(Pattern /Story) Lessons: 13--20

This section is a writing workshop focusing putting together all we have learned into the construction of a story. The key concepts in this section include: Character as Pattern, Flat vs. Round Characters, and Freytag's Dramatic Triangle. Each lesson is based on a workshop model (PROPEL): a short lesson on writing process now, followed by an intensive hands--on workshop in which students (with help of teacher) craft their own projects. Finally, each session is concluded by a period of artistic reflection on the work.

Objectives

- · Students will understand how character is a pattern.
- · Students craft stories using various techniques of characterization.

· Students will craft a story with both a round and flat character

· Students will reflect on how characterization affects story and how their facility with it has changed.

Lesson 13

A Sense of Character (Pattern): Teacher presents the concept that readers get a "sense of character" from a pattern of traits with which a character is characterized consistently, and that a large part of the growth of a character is the reasonable change of those traits given the events of a story. Present the concept dynamic/round characters and flat/static characters. Examine several passages for the same character within the same story to see how a pattern of traits is consistently shown and how those change for a round/dynamic character in a story. Model this on the board with a character from the initial exercise (and two or three traits chosen for the character); create three passages: at the start of the story, right before some conflict, and at the end. As you model have students begin helping you create the passages. When this is complete, students will reflect in the project--process logs on how they expect this will develop in their story. After writing discuss this as a class, with each student presenting his or her thoughts. When this is finished move students into a writing workshop that will continue for the next seven lessons

Lesson 14--20

Characterization in Story: This is an intensive writing workshop period. Each day students log the number of words they have written at the start and end of class on a public board, as well as the part of Freytag's triangle they are on. The teacher moves through the room helping students characterize as they write and revise their stories. During this phase of the unit, the students must reflect in their project--process logs each day about what they characterized that day; they should write down a passage, the techniques they used (both prose and content), and how the story as a whole is developing a "sense of character" for its main character. At the end of this set of lessons, students should have at least two drafts, preferably three. Some classes may need more than seven days to work through the drafting cycle.

Culmination

When the unit and story are finished, publishing works is a critical extension of the unit. It seals the learning the students gained and presents the opportunity for a final reflection. If possible, have the students, or an art class, create a picture of the main character from the story. Students will then share these with each other in class. As part of the publishing process have students compile and organize their portfolios. They should select the three exercises that were critical to their learning, one set of board notes, three reflections from the creative research part of the unit, and three reflections from the drafting/revision part of the unit. The final part of the portfolio is completed when the students read their work to each other; after the sharing, the students reflect in their project--process log about the unit and story as a whole. In the final reflections students must discuss how they grew as writers through the unit, what they learned, what they would do differently, what they would like to learn more about, and how it felt to have their work "published".

Annotated Bibliography

Teacher Resources

Anderson, Linda. Creative Writing: A Workbook. Oxford: Routledge, 2006. Print. A guide to writing fiction; used for common insights on the elements and process of fiction.

Anderson, Richard C. 1977. "The notion of schemata and the educational enterprise: General discussion of the conference." In Anderson, R. C., Spiro, and Montague 1984. Interest level: academic. A discussion on schema and its relation to how individuals view people; used for the section on pattern

Arts PROPEL: An Introductory Handbook. Cambridge: Project Zero, 1991. Print. A methodology for arts classroom based on process oriented portfolios; it guides the design of the unit and lessons.

Butcher, Jim. Grave Peril. New York: ROC, 2001. Print. A urban fantasy novel that is used as an example of various sorts of characterization.

Burroway, Janet and Susan Weinberg. Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft. New York: Longman, 2006. Print. A general writing guide used for methods of characterization.

Garner, Brian. The Oxford Dictionary of American Usage and Style. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print. A general reference guide used to define terms and concepts.

Hacker, Diana. Rules for Writers 3 rd ed. Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1996. Print. A reference and usage guide to writing in the English language.

Toolan, Michael. Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction. London: Routledge, 1988. Print. A discussion of

Marzano, Robert and John Kendall. The New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. London: Sage Publications, 2007. Print. An exploration of the changing nature of taxonomies in education; used as a support for the overall flow of the unit.

Neisser, Ulrich. Cognitive Psychology. New York: Appleton--Crofts, 1967. Print. An introductory text on cognitive psychology and schema theory; used to solidfy the ideas about characterization patterns in stories.

Semino, Elena and Jonathan Culpepper. eds. Cognitive Stylistics: Language and Cognition in Text Analysis. Philidelphia: John Benjamins, 2002. Print. A collection of essays on cognition and fiction; used for the section on prose and pattern.

Woodman, Leonora. "A Rhetorical Model of Prose Style: Notes toward a Synthesis of Rhetoric and Poetics." JAC: Journal of Advanced Composition. 2.1/2 (1981): 69--78. Print. An essay on whether compositional style can be taught; used to support the lesson and unit design.

Student Resources

Johnson, Denis. Jesus' Son. New York: Picador, 2009. Print. This is a collection of short stories by Denis Johnson throughout the unit; a high--interest, sophisticated and edgy set of prose.

Classroom Resources

Cameras, process logs, portfolios, excerpts from Jesus' Son by Dennis Johnson (or other high interest, sophisticated text)

Notes

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[1] Robert Marzano, The New Taxonomy,17.

[2] Ellen Winner, Arts PROPEL, 12.

[3] Ibid., 9.

[4] Ibid., 20.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 22.

[7] Ibid., 24.

[8] Lois Hetland, Studio Thinking, 27.

[9] Robert Marzano, The New Taxonomy, 55.

[10] Linda Anderson, Creative Writing, A Workbook, 70.

[11] Janet Burroway, Writing Fictio:, A Guide, 118--126.

[12] Ibid., 158--175.

[13] Ibid., 201.

[14] Jim Butcher, Grave Peril, 1.

[15] Leonora Woodman, "A Rhetorical Model of Prose Style" in JAC: Journal of Advanced Composition, 77.

[16] Diana Hacker, Rules for Writers, 432.

[17] Ulrich Neisser, Cognitive Psycholog, 32--47.

[18] Michael Toolan, Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction, 92