

Student Handout: Unit 3 Lesson 2



Getting to Know Characters

Suggested time: 90 Minutes

What's important in this lesson:

To understand that characters in short stories face real-life struggles just as we do.

Short story characters experience an internal struggle, a decision they must make to reach their goal, and with this decision, as in real life, there are consequences.

Complete these steps:

1. Read “What is a short story?” Handout 1. Highlight key points and write questions about parts you do not understand in the margin. If possible, share your ideas about key points with the teacher and/or other students.
2. Timed writing: Write for five minutes on the topic your teacher gives you using a rapid response strategy. Do not worry about spelling or grammar; just write as fast as you can to generate as many ideas as possible.

Possible topics include:

- “It is better to be a leader than a follower”
 - “It is better to be a follower than a leader”.
3. On your own, complete the “Character Organizer Chart” Handout 2 as you read. If possible, pair up with another student to share points.
 4. Study the “Writing Exemplar: How to write a paragraph expressing an opinion” Handout 3. Apply what you learn to completing “Template: Point, Proof, Comment” Handout 4. You could focus on an element other than setting for “The Last Spin”—or focus on setting for another story provided by your teacher.
 5. Complete “Thinking About Character” reflection questions for Unit 3, Lesson 2 in your Writer’s Notebook.

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Hand-in the following to your teacher:

1. Answers to the “Thinking About Character” reflection questions for Unit 3, Lesson 2 in your Writer’s Notebook.
2. The completed “Point/Proof/Comment Template” Handout 4.

Questions for the teacher:



What is a Short Story? Highlighting Key Points

A short story is a work of fiction that is composed of a series of related events known as a plot. The short story focuses on one or more characters, who, when faced with a problem, must make a difficult decision. By making this decision, the main character sets a goal that takes her or him on an emotional ride that leads to consequences.

Elements of a short story:

1. A short story is short! Only the most important details are included. The number of characters is small.
2. The short story mainly focuses on one character, one place, one dominant impression, and one theme or message.
3. The short story must quickly involve the reader in the action, and the story only covers a brief space of time.
4. These elements can be part of every short story: characters, setting, plot, and theme or message. Quite often in short stories, only one of these elements will dominate.
5. Writers tell most short stories from either a first-person point of view (I) or a third-person point of view (he/she).

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Character Organizer Chart

Complete the chart below by finding the three most important statements that characters say to each other. Next, explain what you think the character is thinking and feeling at that moment.

Short Story Title _____

Character #1 _____

Character #2 _____

	Statement: What does the character say? (Provide quotes)	Explanation: What do you think the character might be thinking and feeling?	Statement: What does the character say? (Provide quotes)	Explanation: What do you think the character might be thinking and feeling?
1				
2				
3				

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How To Write A Paragraph Expressing An Opinion

Writing Exemplar: The Importance of Setting in “The Last Spin”
Template: Point, Proof, Comment

Topic Sentence	I think element of setting is not the most important element for a good story because in the story “The Last Spin” by Evan Hunter, the setting not very well described, but the story is still a very exciting one.
#1 Point	First, setting is not always that important because some stories are better when the setting is left out.
#1 Proof	For example, “The Last Spin” is better without a strong setting because then the gang members could be from any city, even my own.
#1 Comment	By imagining that “The Last Spin” could happen in any house in my neighborhood, I find the story to be more realistic.
#2 Point	Another reason I think that the setting is not that important is that without a lot of description of the character’s surroundings, the actions and words of the characters stand out more.
#2 Proof	For instance, in the “The Last Spin” by reading only what the characters say, the story seems really exciting.
#2 Comment	The reader is not distracted by some description of the room the character is in, or details of what is going on outside.
Closing Sentence	In conclusion, setting is not that important because without it, I can focus on the characters and action. For me this is what makes a story more interesting.

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Template: Point, Proof, Comment

There are many different ways to sort ideas and information and to make a connection in writing. Here, you will use a Point/Proof/Comment strategy to plan a paragraph. Think of this activity as rough notes for your opinion paragraph.

Task: Plan a paragraph expressing an opinion on the topic below.
Develop your main idea with two points, proof and comments.

Purpose and Audience: You are writing for an adult who is interested in your opinion

Topic: Is the element of character the most important for a good short story? (Remember the other elements: setting (time, place, context) or (plot, series of events)

Length: The space provided for your written work indicates the length of the writing expected.

Topic Sentence	I think element of character is or is not the most important for a good story because _____ and _____.
#1 Point	The first reason I think ...
#1 Proof	For example, ...
#1 Comment	

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#2 Point	Another reason I think ...
#2 Proof	For instance, ...
#2 Comment	
Closing Sentence	In conclusion, the ...