



***Analyzing Characters and their Motivations:  
Are Their Choices Right or Wrong?***

by Kendra McCall, 2014 CTI Fellow  
Reedy Creek Elementary School

This curriculum unit is recommended for  
Language Arts, Grades 4-6

**Keywords:** Choices, Right, Wrong, Philosophical Thinking, Character, Analyze, Free Will

**Teaching Standards:** See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

**Synopsis:** Why do we make the choices we make? Is there always a right choice? What makes this choice the right choice? These questions make us think and wonder deeply about our own philosophical standpoints. In this unit, students will analyze choices that characters within the books they read make based on their motivations. This unit will also allow students to analyze their own choices by diving into questions that are not easily answered. Students will connect with their characters on a variety of levels by journaling and discussing with partners and small groups. This is an opportunity for children to create their own theories, but also to allow their ideas to change based on new evidence from others. There are lesson plans, strategies and a collection of great books with strong characters within this unit. If you are a teacher willing to allow your students more independence and freedom to think about their own thinking, then this unit will be a great chance for exploration within your classroom.

*I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 25 students in Language Arts.*

*I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.*

## **Analyzing Characters and their Motivations: Are Their Choices Right or Wrong?**

*Kendra McCall*

### **Overview**

Ever since I was young, I have been a person who thinks deeply about why things happen. I was the child who always asked the question "why?" No matter what I was told to do, I asked. Whether it was friends, parents, or even teachers, I asked. Sometimes, this question would get me into some major trouble. But I wasn't asking to be obnoxious. I truly wanted to know why things were the way they were and why people did the things they did. It wasn't until I reached high school that I realized that this was a great tool that I was blessed with.

In English I, my teacher challenged me while we were reading the book "Night" by Elie Wiesel. We were discussing the events in Chapter 2 of the book when Madame Schachter screams about seeing fire. She was gagged and beaten by the other Jewish people on the train right in front of her child. I asked, "Why would they beat someone who is in pain?" My teacher did not give me the answer. Instead she asked me, "Why not?" Then she said, "What would make a group of people behave this way when they know that it is wrong? Or is it really wrong?" This completely threw me for a loop. Teachers are supposed to give the answer. From that point on, I continued to ask the question of why. However, I also began to try and answer the question of why characters did certain actions and why humans do certain actions. My love for discussion, critical thinking and deep conversation grew into a continuous analysis of the world around me.

As an elementary school fifth grade Literacy teacher, I truly enjoy being part of learning opportunities that allow me the chance to collaborate with teachers from other schools, districts, and subject areas. It is important to stay on top of my game in the sense of keeping up with the current curriculum. It is important for me to maintain and learn new ways to attack the minds of my students. I strive to grow as an intellectual facilitator for my students. The Charlotte Teachers Institute (CTI) seminar group, "Human Agency," greatly captured my interest. It captured my attention mainly due to the name. I knew that agency related to purpose. Therefore, I began to think about human purpose which in turn made me think about why people do the things they do.

The first Thursday that we met at Davidson College was captivating. There were so many different ways to view the title "Human Agency." From human motivations, choices that we make, human morality, all the way to psychological reasons for human actions, the ideas and discussions were phenomenal. Meeting every Thursday night truly increased my ability to welcome very new and different views on humans and their

choices. In the meetings we have been able to dive into extremely philosophical viewpoints from ancient philosophers such as Socrates and Aristotle, to more recent philosophers such as Sartre.

By examining all of these philosophical views, we were able to add our own views during our discussions. We examined a psychologist who has a strong background in philosophy by the name of Gopnik. She has a book called *The Philosophical Baby*.<sup>1</sup> The excerpt that we read from the book allowed us to dive in and examine imitation being a reason for children's actions. This means that children do certain actions based on what they see from others. The introductory chapter of *Free Will: The Basics*, written by Meghan Griffith, was a piece that pushed me to think critically about choice and freedom. It helped me decide on the books to use for the class discussion. The meeting was a safe zone for our diverse discussion which allowed for us to openly share our own thoughts and ideas. This has been one of the greatest opportunities to help teach me what human agency is and allow me to begin to think through how and why our children in elementary school may think about certain things and choose specific actions to follow.

### **Content Objectives**

This unit of study will focus on understanding character development while allowing students the opportunity to develop their own self-character through examination of our character's choices within the books that we are reading. Many students in elementary school may not truly know right from wrong and how to behave in a correct manner. I want the students to develop a philosophical thinking mindset. They will learn to allow others to share their ideas, and even though they may disagree, students will develop a skill of listening and responding to each other. In this unit, they will have an opportunity to examine right and wrong, but also to analyze and determine if the characters are making genuine choices or if they have to behave the way they do. This will allow students the chance to dive in and become the character while developing a sense of critical thinking that can be applied to everyday thinking and events in their lives.

My objective with this unit is to develop these students into lifelong learners with critical thinking skills that they can apply to their lives. It is my job to prepare students not only for reading, math, and science curriculum, but also for real life situations. I want students to know and understand that we do have choices, but we must analyze all of our options. Every choice we make has an outcome. Every choice that we make will not be perfect, but with critical thinking and weighing all options, we will be able to understand why and how our choices impact the world around us.

Students will discuss and examine multiple scenarios and outcomes to help them better decide on the route they will take when determining their choices. By examining characters' actions, determining how we feel about their choices, and then creating and analyzing other options, we can grow as individuals. Children will be able to grow and

develop their own ideas through this process. By examining realistic fiction and historical fiction, students will get their own ideas but also have opportunities to think about how things would be different if other choices were made. Right from wrong, and what that truly means will be a huge discussion point throughout this unit.

## **Demographics**

I am a fifth grade teacher at Reedy Creek Elementary School. We are located in Charlotte, North Carolina about fifteen minutes from UNC Charlotte. We are considered a neighborhood school. We have a variety of neighborhoods located all around our school. I am currently in my third year with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS). I have taught fifth grade each year at the same school. I also completed a six month interim position in a kindergarten classroom at Nathaniel Alexander Elementary. I am a very hands-on teacher who loves to keep my students active. Working in the second largest school district in North Carolina has been a challenge. However, it allows a chance for interaction with a very diverse group of students. I teach on a team with four women. We have a block schedule where each teacher focuses on one core subject along with class meeting, interactive read, and writing. I teach Literacy where we are following the balanced literacy framework (mini-lessons, independent reading, and writing). My team is wonderful and we work well together trying to integrate our subjects. We work very hard to collaborate on objectives that we must teach. I couldn't ask for a better team.

In fifth grade, we have 95 students. Each class has anywhere from 23-25 students. Our population is extremely diverse. We have approximately 800 students attending our school. We have about 57% of students who are African-American, 24% Hispanic, and about 13% Caucasian. The remaining students include Asian, Native American, etc. Based on CMS selections, 100% of our students are receiving free lunch and breakfast. 66% of our school's population is considered to be economically disadvantaged. 1.3% of our students were tested and placed into the category of academically gifted. 6.5% of students account for our population of students with disabilities. Our limited English proficiency accounts for 10.5% of school. Our average attendance for all of our students was 95.3% this past year.

Based on last year's testing data, our school is ranked 68th out of 100 CMS schools. Most students struggle with reading skills and behavior. This past year, we had 36.6% of 5th grade students proficient in reading. 38.3% of our 5th graders were proficient in Math and 43.3% were proficient in Science. Overall as a school, we had 34.9% proficiency. Although these scores may be low, we did meet expected growth based on current EVAAS data.

We have a low percentage of parent involvement within our school, however we have added this to part of our school improvement plan. We want to encourage more parent involvement within and outside of school. Our PTA is highly functioning and is a very

active group of parents. They are involved in every aspect that they can be involved in and are working hard to encourage other parents to become more involved. We are lucky enough to have 14 assistants available to help support the teachers and students in the classroom.

Technology is extremely important to the development of our school. As a member of the technology team at my school, I have been given the opportunity to help develop a plan to increase every teacher's ability to use more technology in the classroom. We currently have 100 Ipads available for teachers to check out throughout the year and use in the classroom. We are pushing for every teacher to understand and use Gaggle as a form of communication to help improve classroom collaboration. We are moving towards more technology usage in our classroom. Most teachers are using Google Classroom or Gaggle to allow student communication and collaboration not only with classmates, but also with other students throughout the school. We are going to be ordering Mac books to allow for another piece of technology for the teachers to use. We have 1 computer classroom, 3 computers in each classroom, 1 laptop cart with 24 laptops, and many teachers are moving towards Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT). We would like to have each and every student have multiple opportunities to use technology to the best of their ability.

North Carolina has implemented Common Core Standards<sup>ii</sup> in each and every school. Common Core is a curriculum that incorporates critical thinking alongside higher and deeper reading comprehension. With this curriculum, students must be able to write and verbally explain their thinking for solutions to problems in every subject. They are expected to increase their ability to collaborate and communicate with other students. This curriculum has greatly allowed for teachers to dive deeper into skills that students will need academically and in their everyday lives. It involves a new way of thinking and planning to help these students grow as individuals and team players.

## **Rationale**

My rationale for writing and teaching this lesson is to help students foster their ability to think philosophically and understand their own ideas. I want students to be able to support their own views and ideas and be able to understand that choices are not always easy to determine. Deciding what to do in any situation can be difficult, as every choice does not have a black or white answer. However, I also want them to understand that even though there may be obstacles standing in their way, their choices are important. Their choices will dictate who they are as people and citizens. We will focus on the choices that our book characters have and the decisions that they actually make. We will determine their motivations and the outcomes of their actions. By doing this, students will be able to reanalyze their own choices and get ideas about how to react to choices they will make in the future.

I think that human agency is extremely important for my students to know and understand. With behavior being a focus for our school, specifically negative behavior of African-American males, this seems like a noteworthy topic to discuss. Many of the students in our school have heard people say “this is right” and “this is wrong.” However, many of them have never had the opportunity to truly determine what makes an action right or wrong. They often do not have an opportunity to think through their actions before they choose them. By examining our characters’ actions, students will be able to reexamine their own choices and motivations.

This unit is a plan created for fifth graders. It can easily be differentiated to reach each and every student no matter their ability. It will focus on literacy, language and writing skills. It will also pertain to some of the main concepts within the fifth grade essential standards: choice, human activity, conflict, and change. Although students will be analyzing characters within the books we are reading, we will still dive into each and every choice made and the cause and effect of each. The books we will be reading will include characters that the students can relate to, whether the genre be realistic fiction or historical fiction.

Students will use evidence from the text that they are reading to help support their thoughts and ideas. They will cite textual evidence when making inferences, predictions, or drawing conclusions. When students speak in groups, or discussions, and when they write their responses to questions, they will use the text to help support their ideas. Fifth graders will work on summarizing key points and determining details to support the main ideas. The biggest skill that students will work on is determining how characters respond to challenges and relating this to their own life choices.

**Critical Thinking Questions:** These questions will be discussed and debated during group discussion, and used for critical written responses.

- What is right? What is wrong? This will be one of the first critical thinking questions that children will respond to. They should write a response, share the response with a classmate, then, at the end of the unit, students will be asked the question again to see if their thoughts have changed.
- Is it ever okay to lie? Why is it okay at some times, but not at others? Students will investigate and discuss their own thoughts towards this question. This will force them to think about incidents where the choice to tell a “lie” impacted them positively or negatively.
- How do our choices dictate the world around us? This question will force students to think not only about their own lives, but the world around them. It will push

students to see that every choice has an outcome sometimes larger than what they can see.

- What is free choice? Is it something that every person is able to have? Do we have free choice? Allowing students to create their own definition of free choice will then influence their thinking towards their own free choice.
- Is there always a right choice? If not, then how do you decide? Students will be pushed to the limit with this question. They will independently respond to this question and then challenge each other in a debate over the topic. Students will analyze their own reasons for the choices that they make.
- Can we choose how we feel? Can we choose how we respond to our feelings? While reading *Tiger Rising*, students will examine an array of characters who deal with many different problems. These characters have changing personalities and feelings. This will allow students to decide if feelings are our choice or influenced by others.
- Do memories help us make our choices? Are memories important? What about bad ones? Students will think back through their own memories. They will determine whether or not these memories help with us making choices.

## **Strategies**

**Class Meeting:** Teacher will meet with the class to discuss key points to help develop individual characteristics. This is a chance for students to share their thoughts, feelings, and the choices that they are making in their everyday lives. This is a great opportunity to read books that model choice. Class meetings will help increase the classroom community, as well as increase the students' ability to speak in front of peers and respond to each other's ideas.

**Socratic Seminar:** Students will meet together as a whole class to carry out discussions. This is similar to class meeting, but each student must give at least one response during this time. Scholarly language is going to be extremely important during this strategy. Scholarly language is the use of statements to push the conversation along. Students are able to disagree, add to, and agree with their classmates without speaking rudely towards one another.

**Interactive Read Aloud:** This is a chance for students to watch the teacher model reading skills. Students will use the strategies of turn-and-talk, think-pair-share, stop-and-jot, and stop-and-draw. This is a great opportunity to hear student ideas in a short amount of time while also teaching the students proper reading skills. It is important to pull out

new vocabulary before beginning to read to the students. Keep the vocabulary posted as you are reading and remember to reference the words.

**Book Clubs:** Students will work in groups with other students on their same reading level. They will read a book and discuss questions while they are reading. Each student will be assigned a role in the group discussion. This will allow for more in-depth, critical thinking while the teacher is again acting as the facilitator. One student will lead the discussion, while the others carry out a deep discussion. Roles will include Questioner, Quote Master, Investigator, Summarizer, Connector, and Discussion Leader. The Questioner will create critical thinking questions for the group to discuss. The Quote Master will pull out key phrases that relate to the topic or find phrases that stand out as great discussion topics. The Investigator will research background information about the author or events that are occurring within the story. The Summarizer will summarize the group discussion. The Connector is in charge of making connections to the text. This person will be responsible for recording group member connections as well.

**Write/Pass/Respond:** After listening to reading, students will have open-ended questions to respond to. To allow students to truly be able to understand and hear their group member thoughts, they will write a response to a question. They will then pass it to the next person. The next person will respond to the question and other student's response. This will continue until each and every student has responded to the question.

**Journaling Responses:** Students will use their response journals to respond to critical thinking questions that are presented to them within the class. Students will create stop-and-jots to journal their ideas. Students will also share their thoughts, ideas, and feelings to actions and choices that characters make. Students will use graphic organizers when they journal to track character motivation for their actions.

**Blogging (Gaggle):** Students will use Gaggle to take on the role of a character in their book. They will create a blog recording their character's feelings and analyzing the choices that they make. Students will become the character and, like a diary, show the individual's thoughts, ideas, and other key details that will describe how and why they do what they do.

**Class Debate Switchery:** Students will debate critical questions with other classmates. This is a great opportunity for students to set their views about topics and decisions. They must use evidence to support their views. However, students are able to change sides in the classroom when they feel their thoughts change. The objective is to get people to change sides by using factual and conceptual evidence.

**Classroom Carousel:** Questions will be posted around the room. Students will work in small groups to respond to the question. They will then rotate to the other questions. Students should have about 5-10 minutes at each poster in order to discuss and debate



over their responses. Once students have returned to their original chart, they will discuss with their group the key points that were made and decide on how they will present all of the information. This will take about 10-15 minutes. The actual presentation of information will take about 2 minutes.

### **Strategies and Activities**

This unit is designed to take place over a two week period. However, bits and pieces of this are ongoing throughout the year. Many of the critical questions are important to help students increase their awareness of the world around them and to increase their critical thinking and ability to make choices. A formal assessment on analyzing characters and their choices will follow the unit. Students will have opportunities to analyze not only book characters and their choices, but also their own everyday choices.

#### **Day1**

The initial day of the curriculum unit will be a focus solely on what philosophical thinking means. Students will be introduced to scholarly language and use this to increase their ability to speak properly towards each other. It is important to explain to students that with philosophy, there is not always a perfect answer. They will be expected to use evidence to support all theories that they perceive as true. The teacher will explain to students that in many of the meetings, he/she will be acting as a facilitator. Students should not be afraid to share their ideas. Push students to think of themselves as scientist who must dig into their own thinking to create ideas.

After an introduction to philosophical discussion, we will begin with a class meeting. The first class meeting will be a chance for children to discuss and share right and wrong. Students will journal a response to each of these questions: *What does it mean to do right? What does it mean to do wrong?* After students have been given some time to respond to the questions, they will share in a small group. Students should be expected to be working on speaking politely using scholarly language. After a discussion with their group members, students will share with the class what they discussed. The teacher will display the definitions of right and wrong and then challenge the students to change their ideas about what it means to do right or wrong. The teacher will explain to students that in this unit they will be analyzing characters' actions and their choices, while also examining their own choices.

After the class meeting has come to an end, the teacher will begin an interactive read. The first interactive read of this unit will be the Frog and Toad story, "Cookies."<sup>iii</sup> The teacher will model her own thinking while reading the short passage aloud. Students should have opportunities to turn and talk, stop and jot, and show their partners how they believe the characters may look while going through specific events. There are many questions that should be asked including, but not limited to: What is willpower? Do you

think that Toad made the right choice? Do you think this was the right choice or not? How did they show willpower? Remember to pay attention to the students' responses as they will be necessary in later class meetings and discussions.

Today will also be the first day of book clubs. Students will be placed into their book clubs and introduced to what a book club does. It is important to make sure that students understand their roles in book clubs. On this day, students will work in their groups to create a list of rules that they will follow. They will also create a list of topics, strategies, and ideas that they plan to discuss in each meeting. Allowing the students the freedom to create the rules forces the teacher to step back into the facilitator role. Encourage the students to add rules that you agree with, but also allow them the freedom to create their own rules. 4-6 rules should suffice. Students will be introduced to their book, *The Giver*.<sup>iv</sup> You can use a variety of books if you would like, but make sure that each book has a strong character who faces both internal and external conflicts and is forced to make choices that effect the character's life. This will allow for the critical thinking to appear in the discussions as well as other areas.

## Day 2

Class meeting will begin with a review of "Cookies." Remind students what the story was all about. Post on the board the word willpower. Ask, "What is willpower?" Allow students time to share answers. Define what the word willpower means. The larger questions to push the students' thinking are: Does willpower help you make right choices? Was it willpower, or something else, that make Frog and Toad not eat the cookies? Students will break into groups to discuss these questions. You may want to post them on the board. Remind them to use scholarly language as they are working and to be respectful of each other's thoughts. After about 5 minutes, come back together as a class and discuss their thoughts and ideas. Try to push students in different directions to think with an open mind.

The teacher will introduce the interactive read story *Tiger Rising*.<sup>v</sup> Allow students to turn and talk to predict what the story will be about and why. The teacher will read the blurb of the story and then begin reading pages 1-10. In these chapters, the students are introduced to Rob, a 10 year boy who is dealing with some very troubling situations. He recently moved, he has a rash, his mother passed away, he has no friends, and he found a caged tiger in the woods. Rob meets Sistine, a very outspoken yet proper young lady who does not keep her opinions locked away. Allow students to share their thinking in different ways. (This will be the book that is read for the rest of the unit during interactive read and during mini lessons.)

After interactive read, the teacher will teach a mini lesson. The teaching point of this mini lesson will be that good readers grow theories about characters in their books. The teacher will begin the lesson by explaining what this means. Next, you will model how to

do this with your interactive read. After modeling, you will allow the students to try to grow their own ideas. Remind students of the skill they learned today and encourage them to try it on their own when they are reading their book club book.

Following the mini lesson, allow students to begin independently reading their book club book. Students should meet once or twice a week to discuss the book that they are reading. Each student receives a list of chapter questions. Students must choose at least 2 questions to answer using evidence to support their answers. These will be questions that will push the conversation during book club. They will be expected to have chapters 1-3 read and questions answered by the first meeting.

### Day 3

We begin this day with a class meeting that focuses on feelings. The teacher will read *The Way I Feel*<sup>vi</sup> by Janin Cain. After reading the book, the teacher will ask the students examples of different types of feelings. Students will then complete a carousel activity. In the carousel activity, students will rotate around the room to different posters with different feelings listed. Students will work in groups to create a list of signs and gestures that let someone know that they feel this way. They will write or draw them on the chart. After each student has made their way around the room, a discussion will be held to share some of the actions that show others they feel a certain way. The teacher will ask, “Can we choose the way we feel?” Allow students to discuss and share their opinions on this question. Then ask, “Do we have a choice in how we react to these feelings? Can we use willpower to help us react the right way?” Allow some time to share. Remind students to keep these ideas they have in mind as you continue your interactive read.

Before beginning interactive read, be sure to summarize what you have read so far in the story. It is important for students to hold onto the information that they have already learned from the story to truly understand their character. Today's reading is pages 11-21. Students will learn that Sistine does not enjoy being in this town or school. Rob will be sent home from school for an extended period of time due to people believing that his rash is contagious. Rob begins to feel “free” since he knows his leg will never heal. This is a great chance for students to discuss right from wrong, as well as characters’ actions because Rob ends up speaking out to save Sistine when she gets into a fight at school with a large group of students.

Today’s mini lesson is that good readers pay attention to actions that people and characters take. Explain to students that the way to read people and characters is by paying attention to the things that they do and the things that they say. Their actions can be windows to the person. In life and as we read, we must pause after an action to use what happened to help understand the person. Choose an event in the book, and show students how to use the action to grow a theory about the character. Make sure to allow students an opportunity to try by using a page from today’s interactive read.

During book club today, remind students to continue responding to two questions per chapter. They should be up to chapter 4 by tomorrow in order to meet in their discussion group to begin their book talk.

#### Day 4

This class meeting will get the students thinking about choices. The meeting will begin with students jotting down their own ideas of what choices are by using a bubble map. After 2-3 minutes of recording their own thoughts, create a class bubble map showing what a choice is. Allow students to share their ideas of what makes a choice a choice. Allow students to share some examples of choices that they make every day. Once students have shared some ideas, the teacher should share a few (or use some that the students have shared). A good example may be having the choice of what outfit to wear today. "Raise your hand if you agree that this is a choice that we have." Most students will raise their hands. Challenge the students by asking whether this is really a choice. Ask whether it could be that other people determine what they are going to wear. Have students turn and talk about this. Have students consider whether they have ever felt like they could not pick for themselves. Have them give examples and discuss whether there was really a choice involved. Have some examples ready to add if students do not offer them (suppose they go to their closet and find an outfit that they have been picked on about. Does this determine what they choose?).

During interactive read today, you should read pages 22-34. We learn more about Sistine and Rob while beginning to see a friendship developing. Sistine sits with Rob on the bus, and for the first time, Rob talks to someone and shares some of his thoughts. Rob shows his dad the letter and dad decides to let him help around the motel. The main character begins to carve after dinner and winds up carving an image of Sistine. We also begin to learn more about dad's character and start to understand why he is so sad and miserable. Remember to allow students to jot and share some of the things they are visualizing as you read.

This mini lesson will teach students that characters can be complicated. They are not just one way. This teaching point will push students to continue to have an open mind about characters in their stories. It is important to pay attention to when our characters act out of the ordinary. You may need to explain that this means that the character does something that we wouldn't expect them to do. A great place to model for students would be in chapter 6 when Rob stands up for Sistine. Show students how to jot down the moment that he did something different and explain what it tells us about the character. Allow students to try by rereading a section from today's reading that shows that a character was acting out of the ordinary. Students should jot their idea and theory. Remind students to use this skill today as they are working in their book club groups to discuss their readings.

This is the first day that students will meet in their book club groups to discuss the book they are reading. Remind students that a book talk consists of everyone discussing and sharing out their ideas. It is important to be respectful of others' ideas. Students can use the questions that were given as starting points, but these do not have to be the only questions that you discuss. Allow students 15 minutes to meet in their book club groups to discuss any thoughts, questions, or ideas that they had while reading. After the book talk, students will each complete a reflection for the meeting today. Students should begin reading chapters 4-8. They will need these sections read by their next meeting.

## Day 5

Continue the class meeting from yesterday that focused on what the word choice means. Today, however, students are going to discuss free choice. This will be a chance for students to not only analyze choices they have, but also what it means to have free choice. The critical question that will need to be discussed today is "Do you ever have free choice?" Allow students to share when they believe they have had free choice. It is important to explain to students that free choice means the freedom to choose what you want to do. Some students will say they have free choice when they go to recess (if not, you can mention this). Allow students to physically choose a side of the room. Side A is for students who believe that during recess at school they have free choice of what they can do. Side B is for students who believe that during recess at school that do not have free choice. Allow students to debate if they believe this is true free choice. This activity, debate switchery, gives students the chance to change sides if their minds are changed. It is important for each student to be given an opportunity to talk at this time. You may need to use coins, or chips, to ensure that each student speaks. Students may change sides at any time. Feel free to throw your own ideas in about why students may not have free choice at recess. ("We can only play in certain areas" is a good example) Once the debate is complete, allow students to come back together and discuss that students had a choice during this activity. Their choices were swayed by others, but nonetheless, it was still their choice.

Interactive read today should consist of reading pages 35-44. In these chapters, students will be introduced to Willie May who is another worker at the motel. They also notice that Rob acts out of character again around Sistine. He tells her about the tiger that he found in the woods. She wants to see the tiger, so Rob gives her clothes and she gets the opportunity to see his carvings. She believes that his carvings are amazing. Students will notice that the relationship between the two characters is beginning to develop even more as they read.

Today's mini lesson teaching point will push students to pay attention to details in the stories they are reading. As a good reader, we must pay attention to objects and actions that the character holds near and dear to help them grow theories about characters. It is

important to connect this idea to the students' lives. I usually start by explaining to students that I have an object that I have had ever since I was little. It is important to me, because it reminds me of my grandmother who passed away. She always held me when I was sad and would comfort me. (You can use your own connection or object). The teacher will show the students how to identify an object from the story and grow an idea about a character by using it. The students will then try. The teacher will read a section that has an important repeated action or object. Allow students to jot down their own ideas about the object and characters' relationship.

Students will get time to read independently in class today after an introduction to blogging. It is important to allow students to get a little ways into the book before introducing this, so that they can truly get to know their character. Introduce the students to the word blogging. Explain to them that they will become bloggers by using the Gaggle accounts (if you have not already done so, make sure to give students their passwords). If Gaggle is not working, then you can use GoogleClassroom or even allow them to create a webpage on Weebly. It is important to explain to students that they will become the main character in the book that they are reading. In this case, students will become Jonas from *The Giver*. Each day they will be expected to blog about a day in the life of Jonas. They will explain the main events that Jonas goes through during that day. The most important part is for students to make sure and write in first person point of view. They must truly become Jonas and try to talk in the same way, use the same words, and describe things the same ways that Jonas would. Once they have set up their blogs, students will have free time to read. Students can blog at home or at school in their time. Remind them that they should have at least 1 blog per remaining chapter. From here on out, you will allow students to meet as you wish. You will also set the amount of chapters that students should read based on your class's ability and level of learning.

## Day 6

Today's class meeting will continue the conversation about choices. Today we will examine the outcomes of our choices. Explain to students that choices are extremely important. Every choice that we make affects the world around us. Write this on the board. "If the president decides to go to war, will this affect everyone in the world?" Allow students to discuss. Ask students: "How will this affect the people in the United States? What about the people in the country we are fighting against?" Allow students to discuss with a partner. Then ask them: "Will it affect the people who are not in those countries? How?" This will challenge the students to thinking deeper. After a while of discussion, allow students to brainstorm a list of things that they must choose each day, about 2-3 minutes. You should do the same. Select your best idea and then have students choose the one they like the best. Model for students how to create a graphic organizer in the form of a flow chart that shows the choice they would make related to that idea. In each box, students should write how their choice will affect the world around them. The title of each box should be family, neighbors, friends, the school, the city, the state, the

country, and the world. Students must then analyze how their choice will affect each of the categories. It will affect each, so remind them that saying "it won't" will not be an acceptable answer. This will be done independently today and continued into the next day.

Today's reading should include pages 45-55. Students will see one of the first instances where Sistine gets angry with Rob when he will not tell her about his mother. However, she does end up getting her way once she tries to walk away from Rob when he is taking her to see the tiger. The characters get up close to the tiger that is trapped in the cage. Sistine tells Rob that they need to save the tiger. Rob is finally feeling a little happiness with Sistine. A great question to have students discuss and think about is "is it their responsibility to let the tiger go free?" You can also ask, "Is it right or wrong to have the tiger in a cage?"

During the mini-lesson, students will focus on recognizing relationships that the character has with other characters. The teaching point is that good readers notice how people around the character view the main character. The teacher will model by reading a part from the story that shows how another character views the main character. After modeling for students how to identify character views, the teacher will read another section with another character and allow students to turn and talk about how this character acts and how this character views the main character. During their independent read, students will be expected to try to work on the teaching point.

## Day 7

Continue the class meeting from yesterday. Allow students a little more time to add any additional information to their chart that they created. Once students have completed their chart, they should work in collaborative groups to share and select the best one. They will recreate their flow charts on large chart paper. They will then be expected to present their findings to the class. After presentations, explain to students that each and every choice we make has a consequence or outcome. Sometimes these outcomes are positive, but sometimes they are negative. Remind students that we have to be careful of our choices and make sure to think about what the outcomes will be once we make that choice.

Today's reading will focus on pages 56-68. We learn more about Sistine and Rob's relationship. Willie May also appears again and Rob will have a conversation with her about caged animals. He confides in her and asks her questions about whether animals should be caged or set free. Beauchamp is also introduced in this chapter. Students will begin to grow their own theories about Beauchamp. They will recognize that he offers Rob a job that he cannot turn down that deals with feeding the tiger each day.

Today's mini lesson will push students to pay attention to the things that motivate the main character to do certain actions. The teaching point is that good readers can identify

that motivates their character to do the things that they do. There are multiple places in the story where Rob, or any other character, makes choices. There are certain things that push them to make the choices that they make. The teacher will create a 3 column chart. The first column will say "Character." The second column will be titled "Action." The last column will be titled "Motivation: Reason for action." Model for students how to complete the chart by using an event from the story. Allow students to copy and then read another part. Students will record the same that was done before. During independent read, students should complete the chart for *The Giver*.

## Day 8

Today's discussion on choice will get students to think about right and wrong choices. On the board the teacher will write "Right vs. Wrong." Allow students to turn and talk about what it means to make a right choice. Have them share out and record their ideas on the board. Repeat this task for wrong choices. Ask students if they think that there is always a right choice. Allow a discussion to occur with the class about this question. Remind students to use scholarly language. Encourage some students to say that there is not always a right choice. You can do this by having them think about candy choices. If they do say this, then ask "How do we decide on the right choice?" Allow for this discussion to occur. After the discussion, have students work with a partner to create a list of steps to take to help make a choice. Remind students that choices are not always right and wrong, but no matter what choice we make it will always have an outcome that affects the world around us.

Today, the teacher will read pages 69-82. In these chapters, Beauchamp takes Rob to see the tiger in the woods. Rob finally learns what Beauchamp wants to do with the tiger. Students also learn about how Rob's mom comforted him when he was upset by reading about how Rob comforts Sistine when she is extremely upset. This is when she is thinking about her dad. Sistine also has the opportunity to meet Willie May, and Rob hopes that they get along.

In today's mini lesson, students will compare characters with similar struggles in one book. Locate a part in *Tiger Rising* that has two characters dealing with the same problem. It is important to show students how to compare by using a venn diagram. Think about how each character dealt with the problem. Also, think about how they felt about the situation. Ask, "how do their character traits affect their actions?" Allow students to continue this while working on their book club books.

## Day 9

Today's lesson will begin by asking students to define the word memory. Allow students time to share and then give them the actual definition. Explain that the critical question for today will be "how are memories important when it comes to the choices that we



make?" The teacher will read an article titled "Memory"<sup>vii</sup> from *National Geographic Magazine*. Students should listen and jot down notes that will help them explain whether memories are important things to consider when we make our choices. After the reading, allow students to explain how memories can affect the choices that we make. Students will share a choice they made and how it was affected by their memory of an event.

Interactive read will consist of reading pages 83-93. Rob's dad finds the rotten meat that Beauchamp gave Rob to feed the tiger. Rob doesn't completely tell dad the truth, but nonetheless, we begin to realize how upset dad truly feels. Rob also ends up carving Cricket for Willie May. He gives her the carving and before she opens her eyes, she knows that it is a carving of her old pet. Rob also tells Willie May about the tiger that is in the cage.

In this lesson, students will be comparing characters across books with parallel roles. In this lesson, I begin by using superheroes and villains. Most students know who Batman and Superman are, so this will spark their interest. We compare characteristics of a superhero. It will help students understand that even though characters are different, they will tend to behave or act similarly. There are certain characteristics that characters with parallel roles have. Model how to identify parallel roles and use a venn diagram. Students will use a venn diagram to compare and contrast 2 characters with a parallel role within *Tiger Rising* and *The Giver*.

## Day 10

Today students will discuss morals. The teacher will begin class meeting by reading a fable (any fable will be fine). We will read *The Tortoise and The Hare*.<sup>viii</sup> After reading the fable, explain to students the moral of the story. Explain to students that a moral is a lesson that particularly refers to right and wrong. Our morals and values help us determine what we believe is right or wrong. Ask students if morals help them make choices. Students will create a list of things that are important to them. This includes their morals and their values. Remind them that these are things that they think are important.

In pages 94-104 of *Tiger Rising*, the students will catch Sistine trying to encourage Willie May to tell Rob to let the tiger go. However, Willie May never comes out and says that. She says that Rob has to make that decision. However, Rob does decide to let the tiger go. He tells Sistine of his decision and they begin to set a plan. Sistine and Rob run towards the woods and go to let the tiger go. They open the cage to free the tiger and set him free.

The last mini lesson will allow students to continue the use of the venn diagram. However, students will be comparing themselves to the characters within their books. This is extremely important when it comes to analyzing character choices. Model for students how to compare themselves to characters by comparing yourself to a character

within your book. Focus on physical traits, actions, and motivations. Encourage students to move past the obvious descriptions such as both being girls, sad, etc.

## Day 11

Today's class meeting will focus on lies. Read "The Boy Who Cried Bigfoot."<sup>ix</sup> Discuss what the boy learns by the end of the story, which is that if he lies then people will not believe him when it is the truth. Discuss lying and why it is something that we should not do. Then throw out the question that asks, "Is it ever okay to tell a lie?" Encourage students to think about maybe a time they tried to make someone feel better by telling a lie. They made the choice to tell a story to make someone feel better. Are they wrong for lying? You may need to use an example from your life. The example I will use is when I was in my car accident. My mom came in and told my family to tell me that I looked good. However, I had blood in my hair, ripped clothing, a black eye, and a cut on my face that you could see through. Was my mom wrong for lying? It is really important to think about this when we are making choices.

Interactive read today will consist of reading pages 105-116. These are the final pages of the book. These are also the saddest pages of the book. Readers find out that Rob's dad winds up shooting the tiger. Sistine and Rob cry and are hysterical. Rob ends up fighting and hitting his dad. They all decide to bury the tiger. For the first time in months, the sun shines over Rob. After finally sharing all of their feelings, Rob and dad are much better off and are finally happy again.

After today's reading there will be a great opportunity for the students to complete a writing activity. Post this question: "At the end of the story, Rob is really upset when the tiger is shot by his father. However, Rob made a choice to let the tiger go. Whose fault was the tiger's death? How did each character in the story affect the outcome of the tiger being killed? Remember, every choice we make affects the world around us." Allow students to share different characters in the story who had an effect on the tiger getting killed. Characters whom should be listed are Willie May, Beauchamp, Rob, Sistine, Dad, The Threemongers, and the Tiger. Students must write one sentence for each character explaining how this character affected the outcome. Then, they will choose the character that they think made the biggest choice that affected the tiger's death.

## **Appendix 1: Implementing Common Core Standards**

### Reading: Literature

RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text. Students will do this during interactive read and book club. Students will journal and jot their responses.

RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text. Students will use this standard during interactive read and book club. They will record their responses in journals. This occurs within the last 3 mini lessons when students compare and contrast characters to others.

RL.5.9 Compare and Contrast stories in the same genre on their approaches to similar themes and topics. Students will compare characters with parallel roles. They will look at characters in the same genre who deal with similar problems.

### Reading: Writing

W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information. Students will write an opinion piece about who they believe was most at fault for the death of the tiger in *Tiger Rising*. They will need to provide evidence from class and the book to support their decision.

W.5.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. Students will create a blog to record diary entries in the form of the main character from their book club book.

### Reading: Language and Speaking

SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. Students will have multiple opportunities to work in small group or partnerships to discuss and develop ideas.

SL.5.1.B Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned role. Students will follow rules created themselves while working in book clubs.

## **Resources for Students and Teachers**

Calkins, Lucy. *A Curricular Plan for The Reading Workshop Grade 5*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2011. Print. This text is great for teachers who need help with mini-lessons. The section on characters will help to explain the key points to teach students about

character development. In return, it will help students understand their own character development.

Wartenburg, Tom. "Teaching Children Philosophy." 16 October 2014. Web. 20 October 2014. <[http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main_Page)> With this site, Wartenburg has compiled a collection of books that can be used within the classroom to help teach philosophical thinking in particular areas. These books are organized in a way that teachers can easily find books pertaining to a particular category such as ethics.

Wartenberg, Thomas E. *Big Ideas for Little Kids*. Lanham, NY 2014: Rowan & Littlefield, n.d. Print. This book is a great resource for when a teacher begins to teach philosophy. It helps to explain an easy method of teaching the students how to think. The text also gives great examples of lessons with texts that a teacher can do when beginning to teach philosophy.

### **Additional Books With Strong Characters**

*The Great Gilly Hopkins* by Katherine Patterson

*Goldilocks and The Three Bears* by Jim Aylesworth

*Night* by Elie Weisel

*Who Stole Pink Rabbit* by Judith Kerr

Time for Kids "The First Voyage Around the World" by Claire Daniel

### **Bibliography**

Cain, Janan. *The Way I Feel*. Seattle, Wash.: Parenting Press, 2000. This book will be used during a class meeting. It will be greatly related to *Tiger Rising*. Students will understand feelings that they have and try to determine if these feelings are choices.

"COMMON CORE." Common Core. <http://www.corestandards.org/> (accessed September 20, 2014). This website allows for teachers and students to analyze all aspects of the common core. It gives an easy to understand and clear explanation of all of the core objectives for students throughout their schooling.

DiCamillo, Kate. *The Tiger Rising*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2001. This book will be used during interactive read and various activities throughout the lessons. The mini lessons will be strictly related to this book.

Foer, Joshua. "Memory." *National Geographic*. National Geographic Society, Nov. 2007. Web. 31 Oct. 2014. <<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2007/11/memory/foer-text>>. This article is a great piece to read to students about memories. It explains scientists' theories behind memories. It can be used as an interactive read or a reading during class meeting.

Gopnik, Alison. *The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell Us about Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009. This excerpt pushed the reader to think about why children behave the way that they do. It mentions imitation being a key reason for children's actions. This is a great resource to dive into when trying to think about the philosophical aspect of children's actions.

Griffith, Meghan. 2013. *Free Will: The Basics*. Routledge. The introduction to the entire book dives into the problem of free will. It challenges the reader to determine what free will truly is and explains the philosophical thinking behind the problem of free will. It gives great philosophical standpoints on what it means to have choice as well as analyzes why it is important to understand our choices.

Hennessy, B. G., and Boris Kulikov. *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2006. This book will allow students to analyze lying. It will lead into a discussion about whether or not it is ever okay to tell a lie.

"Instructional Strategies Online - Think, Pair, Share." Instructional Strategies Online - Think, Pair, Share. <http://olc.spsd.sk.ca/DE/PD/instr/strats/think/> (accessed October 16, 2014). This website is a great resource that helps to explain different strategies that teachers can use to teach and reach every student that they have.

Lobel, Arnold. "Cookies." In *Frog and Toad Together*. New York, NY: Harper Children's Audio, 1985. This story will be used in one of the first class meetings. It will allow students to think about the meaning of free will. Students will be able to make connections to the choices that Frog and Toad make.

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993. This will be the class book used for book club. You will find it in a variety of sections and days dealing with various activities. This book will allow students to dive into Jonas, the character, and try to understand his motivation.

Matthews, Gareth B. "A Philosophy Startup Kit for Schookids: Based on Text of Plato." Philosophy For Kids. Gary Matthews. Web. 15 Sept. 2014. <[www.philosophyforkids.com%2Fstartup.shtml](http://www.philosophyforkids.com%2Fstartup.shtml)> This website is a great resource for texts and activities. Matthews does a great job writing different stories to push children to think philosophically. He explains his method for getting students to do philosophy themselves and urges them to develop their own thinking about characters and themselves.

Stevens, Janet. *The Tortoise and the Hare: An Aesop Fable*. New York: Holiday House, 1984. This book will be used during class meeting and a later mini lesson. Students will analyze the choices that the characters make and think about the characteristics that made

them choose that route.

Wartenburg, Tom. "Teaching Children Philosophy." 16 October 2014. Web. 20 October 2014. <[http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main_Page)> Wartenburg has compiled a collection of books that can be used within the classroom to help teach philosophical thinking in particular areas. The list of books are organized in a way that teachers can easily find ones pertaining to a particular category such as ethics.

Wartenberg, Thomas E. "Chapter 5: The Elementary School Introduction to Philosophy Course." *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy Through Children's Literature*. 2nd ed. Lanham, NY: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014. 39-48. Print. The chapter in the book explains that philosophy is an intellectual way of thinking. The reader will learn different questions that show and model philosophical thinking. There are great examples of questions to ask students.

---

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Gopnik, Alison. *The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell Us about Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> "COMMON CORE." Common Core. <http://www.corestandards.org/> (accessed September 20, 2014).

<sup>iii</sup> Lobel, Arnold. "Cookies." In *Frog and Toad Together*. New York, NY: Harper Children's Audio, 1985.

<sup>iv</sup> Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

<sup>v</sup> DiCamillo, Kate. *The Tiger Rising*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2001.

<sup>vi</sup> Cain, Janan. *The Way I Feel*. Seattle, Wash.: Parenting Press, 2000.

<sup>vii</sup> Foer, Joshua. "Memory." *National Geographic*. National Geographic Society, Nov. 2007. Web. 31 Oct. 2014. <<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2007/11/memory/foer-text>>.

<sup>viii</sup> Stevens, Janet. *The Tortoise and the Hare: An Aesop Fable*. New York: Holiday House, 1984.

<sup>ix</sup> Hennessy, B. G., and Boris Kulikov. *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2006