



What's Your Super Power?

By Laura Champury, 2014 CTI Fellow
Francis Bradley Middle School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Language Arts Grades 5 and 6

Keywords: Characterization, Point of View, Character Education

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

Synopsis: This curriculum unit focuses on the concepts of helping students make connections between how their behavior – actions, speech, thoughts – has an effect on those around them. Students will study characterization through reading informational and fictional text. We analyze the characters in the text and understand the effect they have on those around them and then transfer that knowledge to understanding our own personal character.

The main curricular goals are for students to understand characterization, narrator's point of view, and dialogue. The expected academic outcome is for students to be able to analyze characters in fiction and nonfiction texts. The philosophical goals of this curriculum unit are for students to internalize their understanding of characterization and apply that understanding to their own lives. Students will learn how their actions affect the way others see them and they will actively pursue ways to change if needed or to continue being a positive influence on others. Students will identify themselves as extraordinary based on the positive way they interact with others. We will create superhero comic books with ourselves as the super hero, to show that we understand and are proud of our actions and interactions with others.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 95 students in Sixth Grade 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.

Background

I am a teacher in a suburban area which is part of a large mostly urban school district. The majority of my teaching day is spent teaching sixth grade language arts. My students are divided up between three sections. I also teach one language arts class at an elementary school which feeds into our middle school. All of my classes have approximately 30 students.

I teach an Honors class, in which the students are all academically on grade level and the majority of them are above grade level. My Honors class is very enthusiastic and they enjoy projects where they can use critical thinking skills. They enjoy debating topics and sharing their knowledge with each other. They are inquisitive and insightful. The students in my Honors Class tend to be kindhearted and get along well with others. They help each other out and enjoy being part of a positive classroom environment.

I co-teach an inclusion class where approximately half of the students are non-disabled students and half are “exceptional children” with varying forms of special needs including learning disabilities and autism. As a whole this section thrives on positive reinforcement. Many students in this class are very sensitive and a negative peer interaction can consume their thoughts and stifle any chance of learning for the rest of the day. Several of these students are impulsive and in need of learning skills to help them participate positively in a community. The interactions between the impulsive students who don’t realize or lack the understanding of how their actions affect others, and the highly sensitive students who have not yet developed the ability to control their emotions creates an interesting dynamic. This class is mostly well behaved and thoughtful.

My third class is an average or “standard” sixth grade class. My standard class is very energetic. They enjoy school for the most part and thrive on social interactions. This group has a positive dynamic and they enjoy learning and working with each other. I want to help them maintain this positive dynamic throughout the year. Since this group is socially aware and motivated, I want to work with them now at the beginning of the year to build their appreciation of choosing positive actions.

I also teach a fifth grade class at the elementary school next door to my middle school. My fifth grade class is considered above grade level or “Honors”. They are eager to please and work hard. Socially, they have primarily positive interactions with each other. They have already formed some groups or cliques since most of them have known each other for a long time. They live near each other and have attended school together and since there is one Honors section, most have been in the same class with each other for many years. This dynamic is different from my sixth grade students who come to middle school from several different elementary schools. The fifth graders have a history with each other and my sixth graders are just meeting each other and making friends and building their new social structure.

The majority of our students come from middle class to affluent families. The community values education. Several of my fifth grade students have siblings in my middle school and feel a connection to the school. The feeder elementary schools in my area all teach some form of character education and work to instill positive values in the students. Parents are supportive and most students will graduate high school and continue on to higher education. There is a sense of community between my elementary school and middle school.

This language arts and character education unit will fit with both fifth and sixth grade students of varying levels. The lessons are designed around sixth grade language arts Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS build each year in complexity so the same lessons could be adapted to fifth grade students or seventh grade students. Since I teach several levels of sixth grade, the lessons are adjusted as needed for each class with ideas for extension and modifications.

Introduction

As my students transition from elementary to middle school they are going through one of the biggest transformations they ever have or will go through. Major changes are happening to their minds and their bodies. Up until now they have been taught the difference between right and wrong and for the most part have adhered to the character education lessons they have been taught. Teachers and parents have instilled an understanding of right and wrong and how they are expected to behave and for the most part they have followed these teachings. However, at this point in human development, adolescents start to question authority and rules they had once accepted. Current brain research tells us that at this point in development, the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for analytical thinking and impulse control, starts a second stage of development. While the adolescent brain is developing, the part of the brain which controls emotions takes on more control and we notice that at this stage of development preteens and teens tend to make decisions based on emotions more than rational thought. They want to make their own decisions and therefore test boundaries in an effort to make their own understanding of their surroundings. At the same time parents and teachers are slowly releasing control and expecting children to take on more adult roles. While adolescents do need to learn independence, they also need adult guidance to help navigate the changes they are going through and the added responsibilities they have.

Peer relationships start to outweigh most everything else in the adolescent world. Adolescents tend to take on behaviors and personality traits which they perceive to be desirable to peers. It has been my experience that far too often the behaviors middle school students think they need to portray in order to fit in with peers are not the same positive behaviors they were taught at a younger age to possess. Therefore, even though they may know deep down inside that they are not acting the way they should, the desire to be accepted by peers far outweighs their conscience. Their rational side knows how to

behave properly in a community, but what Plato refers to in *Republic*, Book IV¹ as “the appetitive part” of the student, wants to pursue other goals, mainly those of fitting in with peers and being accepted. This is a normal stage of development. In *Middle School Makeover*², child psychologist Erik Erickson’s “Identity vs. Confusion” stage of development is referred to for explaining how children of this age must struggle with identifying who they are and what is important to them. In order to move on to be a successful adult, children must successfully navigate their way through this stage between the shelter of childhood and the independence of adulthood. The role of teachers and parents at this stage is to allow children to make their own choices and be there as needed to help guide their choices to be positive.

Hero worship or idolizing media and sports figures also becomes part of the adolescent world. As younger children they had more limited exposure to television, internet, movies and even books. As students enter middle school they are given access to more adult influences and they need to learn skills for understanding and making informed judgments about what they are seeing and hearing.

Children are familiar with superheroes and their superpowers. Using the concept of superheroes as background understanding will help my students make a connection between superheroes and well known humans and what specific “superpowers” they display and then apply those positive powers to themselves. The superpowers that their favorite superheroes use for good will assist us in constructing a set of personal characteristics and skills which students can use for good against the forces of evil that lurk in an attempt to pull students over to the “Dark Side”. We will examine what classifies a superpower as good or bad. Students will infer that not all superpowers or actions are good. People or characters must choose to use their powers for good instead of evil.

People are constantly faced with choices. Some choices are major and require and allow for time to debate both sides and weigh the consequences. Other choices require a split second decision. Sharing a friend’s secret with others, laughing at a classmate who has done something embarrassing, sharing an embarrassing picture – these are just some examples of the split second choices my students have to make on a daily basis. If we believe that people have free will, then it seems that people have the ability to make choices about their behavior. If this is the case, then practicing making good choices will theoretically persuade students to make good choices when they are put in a position of having to make a choice. By planning out different scenarios students may be faced with in middle school and guiding them to stick with a positive set of guiding of principals, the goal is that they will remember the practiced behaviors and they will almost automatically make good choices over poor choices.

There are many thoughts as to what truly defines “Free Will”. For the sake of offering a definition to fifth and sixth grade students, free will is the ability to make choices as

opposed to being forced into doing something. This philosophical topic is germane to the middle school experience. We tell students to make good choices, and that they have the ability to make their own choices, but it is important to consider the environmental constraints on their choices. For example, earning a high mark on a test is a possibility if a student makes the choice to study. However, if time constraints such as soccer practice or music lessons after school, kept them from choosing to study enough, they are then faced with a choice between failing a test and cheating. If those are their only two options many students see cheating as their only choice. Likewise, if a student feels left out or unaccepted socially, and is faced with the choice of joining a peer group as they bully another student or become the bullying victim instead, how can adults supply the tools needed to make the difficult choice of not picking on someone else for the sake of self-preservation?

Many times adolescents choose behaviors they know are undesirable, such as bullying, because it is easier to give in than to stand out. The focus of this unit is to help students realize that they have, within them, the power to stand up to negative influence and do what they know is right. I want my students to know they have the ability to make a conscious choice to combat negativity or “evil forces”. It is not the easy choice to make especially when put in certain situations but it is possible. It takes a stronger person to maintain focus on what is moral and just. A person who gives in to peer pressure is weak and we want to build students up to be strong enough to resist temptations. This unit is designed to encourage students to make positive choices by first agreeing on what would be a positive versus a negative choice and then developing the strength to make good choices. Students will work to find their inner “super power” and develop enough inner bravery to stick to the positive guiding principles they know they should follow. They will analyze fiction and non-fiction characters and classify their actions as those which are positive and that we want to duplicate and those which are negative and that we want to avoid and combat when we see others showing them. Through the study and analysis of character actions and correlating character traits, and philosophically based analysis of character motivation and free will, students should become aware of the effect their actions have on others and actively choose to demonstrate actions which will have a positive effect on others.

Unit Goals and Rationale

What makes a person a hero? That is the summarizing question my students have to answer at the conclusion of our mini unit introducing them to their new middle school. Leading up to that question we have studied the Revolutionary War hero our school is named after through the few written accounts and small amount of historical data that we have. Most students synthesize the idea that places are named after people who are well known for doing something good. This is usually where the lesson ends.

This year I decided to dig deeper into the idea of what characteristics make a hero. When my students composed their responses to the final question of who this man was and why our school should be named after him, I took their responses and looked for “golden lines” or statements that stood out as being significant to help us gain some insight into what characteristics actually do make someone well known in a positive way.

Several of the statements students made related to a hero being “brave”. This idea led me to create a unit to help my students define bravery and to empower themselves to be brave by standing up to what they know is wrong. In our philosophical discussions students will question the concept of what bravery actually is and what makes an act brave rather than just reckless and wild. In discussing the meaning of virtue in *Meno*,³ Plato explains how wisdom impacts courage and suggests that without wisdom an act is not necessarily courageous or brave, it is only bold or reckless. I want students to use their wisdom to develop the courage to stand up to peer pressure and do what is right. Another attribute students recognized as a common characteristic of a hero was the ability to “inspire us”. After students spend time analyzing positive and negative character traits, the goal is that they will be inspired to portray those attributes deemed as positive and heroic.

Before settling on “bravery” or “courage” as positive character traits to aspire to, students should deeply analyze if these are character traits to demonstrate in all situations or if the person in the situation needs to evaluate the circumstances. For example, a student could be faced with a difficult situation where it takes more courage to walk away than to give in to peer pressure. If peers are doing something dangerous like sneaking out at night, or underage drinking, then in those situations the person should evaluate if it is truly more courageous to partake in the risky behavior, or whether, upon reflection, it requires more courage to go against peer pressure and avoid putting oneself in danger. This is where the wisdom to analyze choices determines what is brave and courageous.

On the surface, heroism seems like a positive attribute. When thinking critically about the concept of a hero, and when discussing heroism we must examine all aspects of the concept of “heroism”. We create a working definition of the term “superhero” which includes wisdom, kindness and concern for the greater good. My students have heroes; they look up to sports stars, singers, and actors. All the people we worship as heroes may or may not exemplify the positive qualities which we want students to strive to emulate. Treating someone as a hero without really examining which of the qualities they possess, and analyzing why we admire those qualities in them, can be dangerous. In the book *My Hero*⁴, Elie Wiesel gives the examples of Hitler and Stalin. They were worshipped as heroes by thousands of people. Yet for thousands more they are the opposite of a hero. This unit aims to help students analyze the heroes whom they respect and try to emulate. To justify calling someone a hero, the person should possess positive qualities that benefit not just themselves but society as a whole. I also want the idea of choosing a hero to transcend into students’ lives. A hero does not need to be a celebrity. It could be our

peers or the adults in our lives and it should be ourselves. Students should strive to be a hero. Pointing out and developing our own super qualities should help bolster students' self-esteem.

To my students, society mostly consists of their community, people in their school and their neighborhoods. We are using this concept to help us define a hero as someone who stands out because they possess qualities that push them to perform acts that benefit their community. In returning to the Revolutionary War we have studied, we discuss how he wasn't out looking to be well known or looking to be remembered as a hero. He was just a local citizen who saw danger threatening his community and he took action. This is what I want my students to pattern their choices after. I want to help them identify positive heroic qualities and to integrate those qualities into their everyday lives and to celebrate those qualities when they are demonstrated by others.

In "Existentialism,"⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre explains his philosophy that our actions make a statement about whom we are and which actions we think are appropriate for all people. Existential philosophy proposes that people choose to be who they are. By helping students make good choices and leading them to show others that bad choices are not desirable, the class culture can be positively influenced. Through this unit of study students will learn to be a positive role model for others instead of choosing to follow others' negative behavior. By setting parameters of what behaviors they desire to show others, the goal is for students to not fall victim to peer pressure and to develop and maintain a classroom environment where positive behavior is appreciated by all.

Our classroom and our school are the communities in which we spend the most time and upon which we have the most impact. We will study heroism as portrayed by others outside of our small classroom and school community, with the intended direct impact of our studies having a positive influence on our school and classroom community. As sixth graders, my students are eager to become part of middle school society. When I asked for volunteers from homeroom to serve on Student Council almost all of my class volunteered. When it was time for our first after school football game, I could barely contain the sixth graders all day. They come to Middle School excited to participate and wanting to have a positive experience during their middle school years. All too often, these expectations fall short. This period of adolescence is characterized by peer pressure, bullying, cliques and sporadic instances of losing self-control. The desired impact of this unit is to help students conceive of a set of super powers to evoke when their middle school universe becomes full of difficult choices and anxiety. If they have already analyzed what positive characteristics are important to them and chosen a superpower to guide their choices, then the hope is when faced with the need to make a quick decision to act positively or negatively, students will employ their superpowers and use them for good.

Curriculum Unit Objectives

The overarching objective of this unit is for students to analyze how they behave, compare that with the way heroes behave, and make conscious decisions to behave in a positive heroic manner. I want students to encourage each other to act responsibly in their thoughts and actions by modeling positive behavior for each other. The goal is for acting positively and responsibly to come naturally so that by practicing kindness they choose kindness.

In sixth grade language arts students learn about characterization. This is how an author creates a character in a story. We look for examples of what the character says, how the character acts, and what effect the character has on other characters. We use these clues to identify character traits to describe each character.

The first learning objective is for students to analyze accounts of historical and modern day people whom we consider to be heroes. The purpose of this is to synthesize from the reading what character traits these people possess and what evidence we can find to prove that they have these character traits. Our curriculum objective for this is:

RI 6.5 Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

We also read a variety of texts as well as view video clips and listen to music to build an understanding of mood, tone and theme.

Once we have a list of positive character traits exemplified by our heroes, our next objective will be to create a working definition of “hero”. We will compare and contrast the accounts of true life heroes in order to create our understanding of what makes someone a hero. The curriculum objective for this is:

RL 6.9 Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.

After agreeing on the character traits which we will use as our superpowers, the next objective will be for students to integrate those character traits into their own personal character. Students will create their own arsenal to combat “bad guys” and to remain the superhero. Students will teach others about their superpowers in the form of creating a superhero and telling a story about them with a positive theme about character choices. The story will include dialogue, so we can practice speaking kindly to one another. It will also flow in a logical manner. The specific curriculum standards for this are:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3.a

Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3.b

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Teaching Strategies

Students will be involved in this unit throughout the school year. During the first quarter students are introduced to a local historical figure that their school is named in honor of. Students read non-fiction texts to synthesize information about him and use that information along with their personal knowledge of superheroes to infer what it means to be considered a hero. The class will create a working definition of the term hero and form a class code, or statement of our understanding of what characteristics make up a hero. This statement will be referred to throughout the year as we continue to analyze character traits in the text we read, the videos we watch, and the actions we observe in ourselves and others.

Students will work in small groups throughout these lessons. Each student in a cooperative group should have a defined job and be clear on what the expectations of their job are. One grouping is to have a Captain who is responsible for making sure all group members are on task and completing their assigned job. A Recorder is responsible for writing down information for the group. The Liaison confers with other groups or the teacher as needed. The student assigned to Material Manager is in charge of obtaining materials and returning them in tact when an activity is over. If class size requires, more than one person can act as Material Manager or Liaison. This format for cooperative groups helps to ensure all students are actively engaged and responsible during group work. Taking pride in our work and learning how to communicate effectively with peers are characteristics which students should be working towards emulating.

A variety of genres will be analyzed in this Curriculum Unit. Students will read non-fiction text such as biographies and autobiographies. They will explore character traits in folktales and novels. Students will also view videos. Students will compare and contrast what they read and what they view to make inferences about character traits across genres. The reason for utilizing a variety of genres is so that students will see generalizations across different texts and realize that positive qualities can be applied in a variety of situations.

Students will begin analyzing character traits when they read expository non-fiction texts describing historical events. This will lend itself to modeling how to annotate text and think about what we are reading. This will be used in the beginning of the year to start the discussion of a working definition of the term hero.

Our school subscribes to the student magazine Junior Scholastic. Throughout the year there are non-fiction articles about historical and current events. Students apply comprehension skills while reading these engaging articles and we will use these articles

to practice annotating text and analyzing character traits by creating character maps and holding class discussions. Having all students read the same non-fiction articles allows for Socratic Seminars to be used to examine the character traits in the articles. Questions about the characters can be posed and then students can discuss their opinions. This format will be used to discuss the philosophical questions posed throughout the unit.

Keeping a journal to monitor and analyze our own character traits will appeal to students who prefer independent work as opposed to class discussions. Students will keep a journal in which they analyze their own character traits.

Reading folktales will help students make generalizations about character behavior and learn about overall messages or themes. Examining the moral of a folktale will help students examine the overall message they give others when they behave in different ways. In general simplified terms, it will assist students in understanding how others perceive our positive or negative behavior.

Novel studies will begin with the book *Rules* by Cynthia Lord. This novel is about a young girl whose brother has autism. It discusses how she has rules to try to help him know how to act in different situations. This novel will be used to analyze character traits and character choice, as in how the main character chooses to act and her motivation in different scenes. Characterization will be used to analyze if characters have free will to make their own choices and what constraints influence the choices we make. We will connect the analysis of the characters in the story to our unit topic of developing our own superpowers. This novel makes reference to Arnold Lobel's stories about Frog and Toad. The Frog and Toad stories will supplement our philosophical discussions about bravery and courage.

Argumentative writing is the focus of our sixth grade writing curriculum. Students will compose arguments for or against various character traits being categorized as heroic or not.

Throughout the unit as we read various texts and add to our understanding of character traits students begin to compare the character traits they read about to their own character traits. We apply what we learn from our reading to our own lives. Students will create their own personal strength or superpower which they see in themselves and want to develop. Students will create a superhero alter ego based on their positive character traits. Their superhero will be developed in a student written comic book. The comic book will demonstrate the students' understanding of character traits and how to develop a character in a story as well as their understanding of positive character traits which should be developed in ourselves and demonstrated in our day to day interactions. This product will be modified, as higher level students will create their own comic books and some classes will create a class book.

Throughout the year students will continue looking for examples of themselves and classmates demonstrating positive character traits. Students will be expected to share examples of positive character traits in the form of anecdotes and news articles. The goal is for students to recognize and praise each other for being a role model and for this positive behavior to impact the classroom community.

Lesson Plans

Lesson 1

Introduction – “You are what you do.”

Indirect Characterization – This lesson’s goal is to start students thinking about what positive character traits are and how we can analyze a character’s action as either positive or negative.

Show episode of the show What Would You Do? About a family with child with autism. The family goes out to a restaurant and they are harassed by another patron.

As students react to what they are watching, discuss how students would have acted if they were in that situation. Record their responses and pose the question “why” they would have reacted differently. Note specific examples from the show of actions the characters demonstrated which the students either categorize as positive or negative.

Create a chart of positive vs. negative character traits witnessed in the show. Under each heading make two columns, one for the actions the character demonstrates and one for a word or character trait which that action exemplifies. Use this to introduce the idea that a character’s actions in different situations make others assign certain character traits to that person.

Positive Actions		Negative Actions	
Actions	Describing Character Trait	Actions	Describing Character Trait

Differentiation:

Inclusion – create a class chart together. Each co-teacher will create one chart with a small group.

Standard and Honors – create a chart with a small group. Share charts with class and condense onto one large chart.

Lesson 2

This lesson's goal is to have students practice analyzing character traits as they are portrayed by a fictional character in short stories from our textbook; Holt McDougal, Literature Grade 6.

Show students the indirect characterization PowerPoint.

Create a character map for Rachel in the short story *Eleven* by Sandra Cisneros using the STEAL method.

Students will place statements from the text on a chart to show which type of indirect characterization the example shows.

Students will evaluate the characteristics of Rachel and with a partner choose a character trait to describe her personality.

Independent work – students will read *Ghost of the Lagoon* by Armstrong Sperry and during reading keep track of the way the narrator indirectly describes the main character. After reading and recording indirect characterization on a chart, students will assign a character trait to Mako, the main character in this story.

Indirect Characterization of:	Examples from the text	What does this tell us about the character's personality?
Speech – Record examples of things the character says often and/or things which help the reader understand the character's personality.		
Thoughts – Record what the character thinks about. This could be direct quotes from the text or ideas he/she thinks are important.		
Effect on others – What do other characters do when they are near the character? How do other characters feel about the character?		
Actions – What does the character physically do?		
Looks – What inferences can we make about the character based on what we know about their appearance?		

After reading students will assign Mako with a character trait, most likely “brave” or “courageous”. At this point pose the question, *what does it mean to be brave?* Have students write their definition of what it means to be brave.

Lesson 3

The goals of this lesson are to analyze the differences in point of view between first person and third person narrators and to have students start self-assessing the character choices they are making.

Provide students with cards describing characters in a variety of situations. Small groups will work together to identify how the characters’ actions help us learn about their personality. Small groups will categorize the scenarios on their cards as either positive or negative and assign a word to describe the character trait being shown. Honors group should create their own cards when finished discussing the provided scenarios.

End this lesson by telling students that all of the scenarios were actual events that had been witnessed in school. Briefly hold a class discussion of how our actions show our personality and intentions to others. Pose the discussion question of “why should we care how others perceive us?” Allow time for students to discuss. Assign students with the task of keeping a record of their own actions when faced with making a choice. Students will keep this record for at least 5 days and then students will analyze their own character traits.

Date
Describe the situation you were faced with in which you had to make a choice.
Describe the choice that you made.
How do you feel about the decision you made?
Describe your thoughts and feelings about this choice.

Lesson 4

Socratic Seminar – Introduce the idea of philosophy by using Arnold Lobel’s story “Dragons and Giants” from *Frog and Toad Together*. This lesson is based on the book *Big Ideas for Little Kids*⁶.

This lesson introduces students to the concept of discussing philosophy and ethics. Students listen to the short story then discuss the character traits and analyze if they are

brave and courageous and why. Students also learn that concepts such as courage can be defined in different ways by different people depending on the circumstances. During this lesson, students will create a chart to decipher if the characters' actions are brave. The purpose of incorporating this lesson is that it will set a framework for philosophical discussions and help students analyze why certain character traits are positive or negative. After analyzing bravery through this lesson, have students return to their written definition of bravery and revise it as they see necessary.

Lesson 5

What are superpowers?

The goals for this lesson are learning how to determine if a character is a protagonist or antagonist. Another goal is for students to realize character traits are more than just what a person looks like. Characters are depicted by what they say or do and how they affect other characters.

Show students a YouTube clip of the original Superman show introduction. Discuss how the clip shows us what he looks like and what super human physical powers he possesses. Pause at a point where Superman's strength is being demonstrated to discuss if those physical characteristics are what makes us know he is a "good guy." The answer should be "no" and students should identify that the characteristics which make him a "good guy" or protagonist are that he fights evil and helps others by looking out for what is fair and just. Introduce the concept of characters being protagonists or antagonists.

Show YouTube clip of supervillains

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UqDCIm0yYI> and Protagonist vs. Antagonist
<http://tinyurl.com/slideshareantagprotag>

Students make a personal list of their own superpowers. This is a list of character traits they either currently demonstrate on a regular basis or character traits they would like to show to others and the actions they are going to take in order to start showing a positive character to others.

Based on the students' created definitions of bravery, and our discussion of what makes a character a Super Hero, the class will create a statement or code of how we pledge to treat each other with positive helpful behavior.

Lesson 6

Can Characters Change?

The goals of this lesson are to apply what we have learned so far about characters and their traits, to real people. Students will also learn that characters can change and that people also have the ability to change.

Read aloud A Boy Called Slow. This is a biography of Sitting Bull. This book tells the story of how Sitting Bull was originally called Slow because of his personality. He was determined to change his name and his personality. This book tells the story of how he changed the way he was seen by those around him and therefore was able to change his name.

Discuss different types of characters – flat, round, static, dynamic. Discuss how dynamic characters change and guide students to make the connection between literary characters changing and the idea that students can change their character traits or behaviors in a positive way.

Have students reflect on the journals which they have been keeping about the choices they have been making during the past week. Based on their actions, have students self-assess their own indirect character traits as seen by others. Use the following descriptors to analyze personal character traits.

Say – What have I said to others?	
Think – What have I been thinking about?	
Effect on Others – How have I made other people feel?	
Actions – What are some ways, positive or negative, that I have acted recently?	
Look – What does my outward appearance tell others about me?	

Lesson 7

How can characters change?

The goals for this lesson are to consider alternative actions and to practice positive character traits while working with one another in a small group.

By analyzing personal actions which were recorded in our journal, students will search to find a common theme to describe their actions.

Read aloud the Australian tale “Crocodile and Ghost”, from Rhinos and Raspberries. This folk tale is about name calling. Pull out examples of the characters behaving poorly.

Teacher will pose questions such as: “Why are the characters acting this way?” and “How could the character have acted differently, would different actions of the character change the story?”

Help students create alternative ways the characters could have behaved and how different actions would have changed the story. Discuss with cooperative groups and share with the class.

Writing – Think about a time when you acted in a way you are not proud of. Maybe you didn't stick up for a friend or didn't help someone when you could have. Explain how you could have acted differently and how that would have changed the outcome of the situation.

Lesson 8

The goal for this lesson is to use biographies to analyze character traits of real people. Students will also apply their argumentative writing skills to defend a character's actions.

This lesson may span several class periods depending on the level of students. Show the video trailer for Taking Flight <http://tinyurl.com/takingflightballerina> about Michaela DePrince who was a war orphan from Sierra Leone and through determination and courage was able to become a Star Ballerina. Provide students with short biographies and interviews of famous people, some suggestions are: Michaela DePrince, Malala Yousafzai, Mariano Rivera. Have students read the informational text and decipher a list of that person's character traits. After reading and note taking, students should describe in writing if their person demonstrated more positive or negative character traits. Students should justify why their character should be categorized positively or negatively based on text evidence of their character traits. Students will create a bubble map to show the person in the middle and examples of indirect characterization should be used as the details.

Argumentative Writing – After reading several biographies students will choose one person to write about. Students will decide if the person they are writing about should be considered a hero or not. In the form of a formal essay, students will argue for their person being a hero. Their essay will clearly state their position with three examples of character traits the person has shown which justify them being called a hero. The essay will end with a summarizing paragraph restating the thesis statement of the essay. Use this and student analysis from previous lessons to explore character traits which students want to possess.

Lesson 9

This lesson's goals are to practice writing dialogue and thinking about how what you say affects how others perceive you.

Provide students with statements made by the speaker from the previously read biographies and interviews, but remove the punctuation, have students correct the sentences.

Students will go back to the printed biographies shared in the previous lesson and highlight examples of dialogue.

Show students examples of comics using dialogue bubbles from the paper or comic books. Have students work in groups of four. Two students have a conversation while the other two listen. Then students will create their own cartoon using the highlighted dialogue from the articles.

Lesson 10

Choosing your Super Power

The specific curriculum goals for this project are listed in the project. Students will demonstrate their understanding of positive character traits and how choosing to do what you know is right makes you an everyday superhero.

Show students covers of Marvel comics from October 2014. The publisher put out special covers for anti-bullying in the month of October. Students will brainstorm with their groups about what actions they see being portrayed in the pictures. Students will determine a character trait or a set of character traits which they want to mirror.

Pass out and discuss Super Powers Project. Go over rubric with class and allow students to brainstorm ideas for creating their own comic book.

Superpower Character Comic Book Project

Name _____ Date _____
Parent Signature _____ Due Date _____

Curriculum Standards:

CCSS-RL 6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

RL 6.6 Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

RL 6.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

W 6.3B Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Purpose:

The purpose of this project is to show that students understand characterization, point of view, theme and dialogue. It is also to help students identify positive character traits and establish a set of personal behaviors which display those traits.

This project will be completed at school during Language Arts class. Students may spend additional time working on this at home as needed to ensure quality and to make sure it is completed on time.

You will be creating your own comic book. Based on our class discussions and your background knowledge, choose a positive character trait which you want to be your “Superpower”. This should be a character trait which you have determined is a positive trait and one which will positively impact others. Your task is to show that you have taken on the positive attributes you have identified and that you understand that character traits are determined not only by how you say you behave (direct characterization) but also by how you are perceived by others (indirect characterization). You also need to show your understanding of the point of view of the narrator and theme, as well as your ability to use dialogue and proper grammar and punctuation.

Directions:

1. Choose a positive character trait. Create a character whose superpower is using this character trait for good. For example “Hank the Helpful” or “Respect Man”. Be creative! Create a character map by drawing **you** as this superhero on a full size piece of paper. Label your character map with what/how you will Say, Think, Effect you have on others, Actions, Looks.
2. Create a storyboard for your comic book. Fold a paper into at least 8 equal parts. Think of a creative title for your story and write it on one side of your paper. On the other side use the boxes to plan and sketch the main scenes from your story. Your story must tell the reader about a situation where you, the superhero, used your superpowers for good. Think of a positive theme, or message for the reader to learn, and plan your story so that the reader understands your positive message. You may use more boxes if needed.
3. Revise your story.
4. Now it is time to create your very own comic book starring YOU as the main superhero! Follow instructions for creating a book by folding 3 pieces of plain white paper in half. In class your teacher will give directions for making the book.
5. On the front draw a cover picture and write the title of the story along with your superhero name and your real name as the author. On the inside transfer your storyboard pictures and dialogue into the comic book. On the last page write a synopsis of the story in which you clearly explain the character traits of the superhero (protagonist) and the villain (antagonist), Point of View of the narrator, and theme of the story.

Rubric

Element	Points Possible
Direct Characterization – Clearly state your superhero’s main character trait by using it in your creative superhero name.	10
Indirect Characterization – Through your comic book show that you understand Indirect Characterization. Speech, Thoughts, Effect on others, Actions, Looks	25
Theme – Story clearly shares a positive message with the reader.	25
Point of View – Story is told from first person, third person, or third person omniscient and the author explains the point of view on the back page summary. Key words tell us the point of view being used.	10
Dialogue – Skillfully use character dialogue to move the story along and to build an understanding of the characters.	10
Evidence of Revising through correct: Capitalization, Punctuation, Spelling, Having all pieces of planning turned in; character map, storyboard, final comic book	10
Quality of Work – All pages are neatly illustrated and colored completely. Writing is legible and easy to see.	10

Lesson 10

The goals for this lesson are to review indirect characterization and for students to internalize themselves as being a superhero.

Students will create the main character for their comic book. The main character will be the student, taking on the personality of a superhero.

Review the methods of indirect characterization. Students will draw themselves as a superhero. Students will then label their personal superpowers (indirect characterization), examples of how they will show they are a superhero.

Lesson 11

Goals are for students to successfully compose a story with a positive theme.

Instruct students to create a storyboard from folding construction paper. Review the elements of a short story with the class. Students will create a first draft of their comic book on the storyboard. They will explain a situation in which they made a good choice and acted as a superhero. The story will clearly describe the situation and the choices that the character makes which are positive. The story will include speech bubbles with dialogue between the characters. What the characters say to each other will help the reader understand the positive character traits of the protagonist and the negative character traits and actions of the antagonist. The overall theme or message of the story will demonstrate the student's personal philosophy on positive character traits.

Lesson 12

The goals for this lesson are for students to internalize the lessons they have learned about positive choices and character traits and for the students to continually make good character choices.

Allow students to work on the project listed above during independent workshop time. While students are working on the project the teacher will work with small groups of students who need extra assistance with the unit concepts.

At the conclusion of the unit, students will share their comic books with classmates; they may create a costume that enhances other students' understanding of their superhero and wear the costume on the final day of the unit when we share comic books.

As an ongoing lesson, students will recognize each other for making positive choices throughout the year. The teacher will create a classroom display for students to recognize each other and at the end of each quarter students will choose a classmate who has consistently gone above and beyond and whom they consider to be a superhero, to be recognized.

Appendix 1: State Standards

North Carolina Common Core State Standards

RL 6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Students will read a variety of texts; realistic fiction, folktales, and biographies. Students will use what the text tells them about the characters to make inferences about their personality traits.

RL 6.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments. Students discuss themes in the text they read and use specific examples from the text to support the theme. For example, after reading folktales and agreeing on a moral of the story, students will use text evidence to support that moral.

RL 6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution. We will use the text we read to identify character actions and then analyze why the character acted that way and how their actions tell us about their conscience.

RL 6.6 Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text. We will use text to explore point of view and perspective. Specifically, how a character's point of view is developed based on their previous experiences and how they perceive a situation. If two characters have different perspectives on a situation, the way they retell the story will be different. The lesson is that people should take into consideration the way others perceive their actions.

RL 6.9 Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics. We are reading biographies, realistic fiction, and folktales as well as watching videos which all serve the purpose of teaching us about moral responsibility and personal character. Students will synthesize the information they read to analyze what positive character traits they want to possess.

W 6.3B Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. In the final product students are creating a cartoon superhero. The final product will be a comic book showing everyday superheroes. The comic book will use dialogue, pacing and description.

Resources

Autism Video <http://tinyurl.com/wwydautism>

This video shows a family dealing with negative reactions about their son with autism.

Nonfiction character video <http://tinyurl.com/takingflightballerina>

Antagonist and protagonist video <http://tinyurl.com/slideshareantagprotag>

Holt McDougal Textbook Online for short story:

<http://my.hrw.com/tabnav/controller.jsp?isbn=9780547616148>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/interviews/giedd.html>

Bibliography

Bruchac, Joseph, and Rocco Baviera. *A Boy Called Slow: The True Story of Sitting Bull*. New York: Philomel Books, 1994. This picture book is used by the teacher as a read aloud to exemplify how it is possible to change how others see you by changing your actions. It tells the story of how Sitting Bull was first named Slow and through intentionally changing his actions he changed the way others thought of him and earned a more honorable name.

DePalma, Mary Newell, and Leo Acadia. *Raspberries: An American Tale of Cooperation*. Montgomery, AL: Teaching Tolerance, 2006. This short story will be read by students as a resource for analyzing character traits. This is a companion book to *Rhinos and Raspberries*. This illustrated short story can be used to start a conversation about cooperation and start students thinking about how their actions affect others.

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 teacher resource should be read prior to the curriculum unit to help the teacher build background knowledge. This text discusses what adults can learn about philosophy and human agency by analyzing the behavior of children.

Griffith, Meghan. *Free Will: The Basics*. London: Routledge, 2013. This teacher resource explains theories about free will and should be read by the teacher prior to teaching the unit and as a resource to help guide student discussions during the curriculum unit. Free Will is illustrated through common experiences to help the reader understand.

Icard, Michelle. *Middle School Makeover: Improving the Way You and Your Child*

Experience the Middle School Years. Bibliomotion, books Media, 2014. This is a reference book for teachers and parents. It offers insight into the changes that middle school students are going through and offers suggestions on how to help guide them through these changes while maintaining a positive relationship. Anyone who works with middle school children should read this book.

Lobel, Arnold, Arnold Lobel, and Publishers Row. *Frog and Toad Together*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972. This is a classroom resource which students will read or listen to. This will be used for philosophical analysis during the curriculum unit.

Lord, Cynthia. *Rules*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2006. This young adult novel is intended to be used as a student resource. Students will relate to the characters who are their age and going through some of the same growing pains as the reader.

Lowry, Lois. *Rhinos & Raspberries: Tolerance Tales for the Early Grades*. Montgomery, AL: Teaching Tolerance, 2006. This student resource will be used in the classroom and read aloud to the class. Students will also have opportunities to read this book themselves. This book is a compilation of folktales from different countries. Students will learn moral lessons while building an appreciation for various cultures.

Plato. "Meno" in "Meno by Plato." The Internet Classics Archive | Meno by Plato. Accessed November 21, 2014. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/meno.html>. This text discusses what it means to be brave. The implications discussed are that being brave for the sake of being brave is not actually remarkable unless the person has thought wisely about their actions.

Plato. "Republic" in Cooper, John M. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub., 1997. This teacher resource provides background understanding of philosophy. In this dialogue Plato discusses different parts of ourselves in an effort to understand human motivation and possible explanations for our actions.

Sartre, Jean-Paul "Existentialism." in Marino, Gordon Daniel. *Basic Writings of Existentialism*. New York: Modern Library, 2004. 341-367. This is a teacher resource. Teachers should read this before starting this curriculum unit in order to better understand the philosophical ideas the unit is based on. The text examines how our actions relate to others what we believe is acceptable behavior.

Spinks, Sarah. "Adolescent Brains Are a Work in Progress." PBS. Accessed November 16, 2014.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/work/adolescent.html>.

This web article which comes from PBS Frontline, describes the changes that adolescent brains go through. This is a good resource for all teachers, especially middle and high school teachers.

Wartenberg, Thomas E. *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy through Children's Literature*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2009. This teacher resource should be read prior to teaching philosophy to students. It offers lesson plans to use in the classroom and suggests steps to use in organizing lessons about philosophy. This book is written so that teachers without any experience teaching philosophy can easily understand the lessons.

Weisel, Elie "Hero's Hero: The Concept of Heroes." *In My hero: Extraordinary people on the heroes who inspire them*. (2005). New York: Free Press. This book could be used by both the teacher in planning the unit and as a resource to use in the classroom. This compilation of stories from famous people provides stories to philosophically consider about what makes a hero.

Notes

¹ Plato "Rebublic" in Cooper, John M. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub., 1997.

² Middle School Makeover Icard, Michelle. *Middle School Makeover: Improving the Way You and Your Child Experience the Middle School Years*. Bibliomotion,books Media, 2014

³ "Meno by Plato." The Internet Classics Archive | Meno by Plato. Accessed November 21, 2014. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/meno.html>.

⁴ My Hero *My hero: Extraordinary people on the heroes who inspire them*. (2005). New York: Free Press.

⁵ Sartre, Jean-Paul "Existentialism." in Marino, Gordon Daniel. *Basic Writings of Existentialism*. New York: Modern Library, 2004. 341-367.

⁶ Big Ideas for Little Kids Wartenberg, Thomas E. *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy through Children's Literature*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2009.