Develop Strong Characters in Historical Fiction

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn how to use a character development chart to help them develop strong characters.
- Practice creating strong characters in their writing.
- Discuss how to apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Character Development Chart (BLM 6)
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Character Development chart on chart paper or use the interactive whiteboard resources. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Developing Strong Characters in Historical Fiction

Say: When I write a historical fiction story, I want to give my reader a lot of actual historical facts. But that doesn’t make a story! The audience won’t be interested unless there are strong characters they can relate to. How do we create strong characters? Let’s start with the problem of the story. In real life, you find out a lot about people when they’re dealing with a problem. It’s the same in a story. The way characters feel about the problem and how they solve it makes them seem like people we know and care about. Today I’ll show you how to use the problem and solution of a story to develop strong characters.

Model Developing Strong Characters

Display the Character Development chart on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

About the character at the beginning. Say: I have ideas for my historical fiction draft. I know who my characters are and what the story problem is. Before I begin writing, I want to take notes on how I will develop my characters based on how they relate to the story’s problem. I want my characters to grow and change as they work through the problem. One of my main characters is the young girl immigrating to America. I want her to be strong and determined. Because she’s determined, she’s able to solve the problem. She is resentful of the passengers in first and second class who do not have to experience the hardships the people in steerage face. Maybe she complains about them to her mom. I’ll jot down these traits at the beginning of the story. Her character traits will be challenged by the story’s problem, but she will be able to persevere. Model writing notes in the first two columns of the chart.

About the problem and middle of story. Say: My character is now very worried about her brother and her mother, but she is determined to do something. In the middle of the story, my character meets a boy her age traveling second class. They talk to each other through a gate that divides second class from steerage. She talks to him but is defensive and unfriendly. Model writing notes in the third and fourth column of the chart.

About the solution and end of story. Say: When the boy offers to help by bringing healthy food, the girl changes her opinion of him. She realizes that being wealthy or poor doesn’t make you a better or worse person. Model writing notes in the last two columns of the chart.

Say: Now I have an outline of what my character is like. I can build on this as I write. I can also complete the chart for other characters in my story.
### Strategies to Support ELs

#### Beginning
Invite beginning ELs to draw a picture of one of the characters in their story. Ask them to describe the character in any way they can. Write keywords on self-stick notes and place them on the drawing.

#### Intermediate and Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers. Provide sentence frames for both students to talk about their characters. For example:

- At the beginning of the story, my character ______.
- At the end of the story, my character ______.
- The story problem changes my character by ______.

#### All Levels
If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: character/el carácter; fiction/la ficción; problem/el problema.