Describe Personality and Characteristics

1. Focus

Explain Using Words That Describe Personality and Characteristics

Say: A biography is, of course, the story of a person’s life. The most important topic in a biography is its subject—the person whose life is described. Therefore, it is important for a writer to use words that clearly show the subject’s personality and characteristics. Writers often use adjectives and other descriptive language to show what a biography subject is like. They also describe a person’s traits. Today I’m going to show you how to use careful word choices to describe a biography subject’s personality and characteristics so you can bring the subject of your own biography to life.

Model How Writers Use Words That Describe Personality and Characteristics

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for words the writer uses to describe her biography subject as you read the text aloud.

Modeling Text

By all accounts he was highly intelligent, a brilliant military tactician, and a skillful orator. He was handsome, although he worried about his thinning hair. Humble he most certainly was not. By the time he reached the age of about 50, Caesar had transformed himself from a vain, unscrupulous spendthrift into a brilliant general, an elegant orator and writer, and a profound and conscientious leader.

Say: This text is from the opening of the biography. The writer uses many adjectives and other descriptive words to describe Caesar’s personality and characteristics. I learn that Caesar was highly intelligent, brilliant as a military leader, skillful and elegant as an orator and writer, and profound and conscientious as a leader in general. I learn about visual traits when the writer describes his appearance: he was handsome, with thinning hair. I also learn about a personality trait when the writer tells me Caesar was not humble. Finally, the writer even tells me what Caesar was like before he transformed himself—he was simply vain and unscrupulous. The use of all these rich descriptive words gives me a good sense of the subject of the biography. Knowing about the subject’s personality and personal characteristics also helps me understand the actions he took in his life.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Identify words that writers use to describe the personality and characteristics of a biography subject.
• Practice using words that describe the personality and characteristics of a person.
• Discuss how they can apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Words That Describe Personality and Characteristics

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Explain that this is a sentence that might appear in a biography of a person, telling about his activities when he was young.

Every Tuesday, Frankie played basketball with his friends.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with partners to rewrite and add to the sentence using words that describe a person’s personality and characteristics. Remind students to use specific, vivid words along with interesting details. Invite them to imagine details to tell what the character is like. Pairs of students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. They should be ready to explain the descriptive words they added to the practice text to describe the personality and characteristics of the subject, Frankie.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences and explain the word choices they made to describe the subject’s personality traits and characteristics. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they write their own biographies.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that choosing strong words to describe a subject’s personality and characteristics is a key part of writing a biography. Readers learn about the subject through these descriptions, and helping readers learn about personality traits also helps readers understand a subject’s actions. A good biography writer uses adjectives and other descriptive words to tell what a subject was like.

Ask students to identify a section of their biographies in which they can use precise word choices to describe the subject’s personality and characteristics. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite volunteers to read aloud a section of their biographies in which they describe a subject’s personality or characteristics.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Ask beginning ELs to work with partners. Invite them to describe their partners using oral phrases, gestures, and drawings. Then help students write sentences to describe their partners, using the characteristics they found. Model as necessary.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity. Supply the following sentence frames to help them complete the description:

Frankie was ______.
He looked ______.
People who knew him said he was ______.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: characteristics/las características; describe/describir; personality/la personalidad.