



In this lesson, you can show students that they already know how to study characters, because they have been doing so since the day they were born. We are hardwired to sense friend or foe in order to survive, and then sharpen this capacity to form opinions as we build relationships, live in communities, read, and watch movies. This lesson will become one you refer back to again and again. It can hook students into the study of characters.

Decide to Teach This Tomorrow if Your Students

- Focus solely on plot and what is going to happen next
- Have trouble coming up with their own thinking and ideas about characters
- Stick so close to the literal elements of characters that they are unsure how to form opinions about them
- Are new to talking and writing about their thinking about characters



What You Need:

- A short video clip of a popular book turned film (choose one that is appropriate for your students; in the following example, we used *The Hunger Games* [Collins, 2008] because the students were older)
- Several sheets of large paper or chart paper
- Markers and sticky notes

Tell Why: Explain to students that they already know how to form opinions about people in their lives and characters in movies and that they are now learning how to do this with characters in books as well. Let them know there is no such thing as a wrong opinion as long as it is based on what happens in the text. Tell students that when we form opinions, share them, and then revisit them with other readers, we learn so much about people in general. You might

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show a chart that lists some of the benefits of studying characters such as the one that follows.

WHEN WE STUDY CHARACTERS, WE CAN LEARN TO

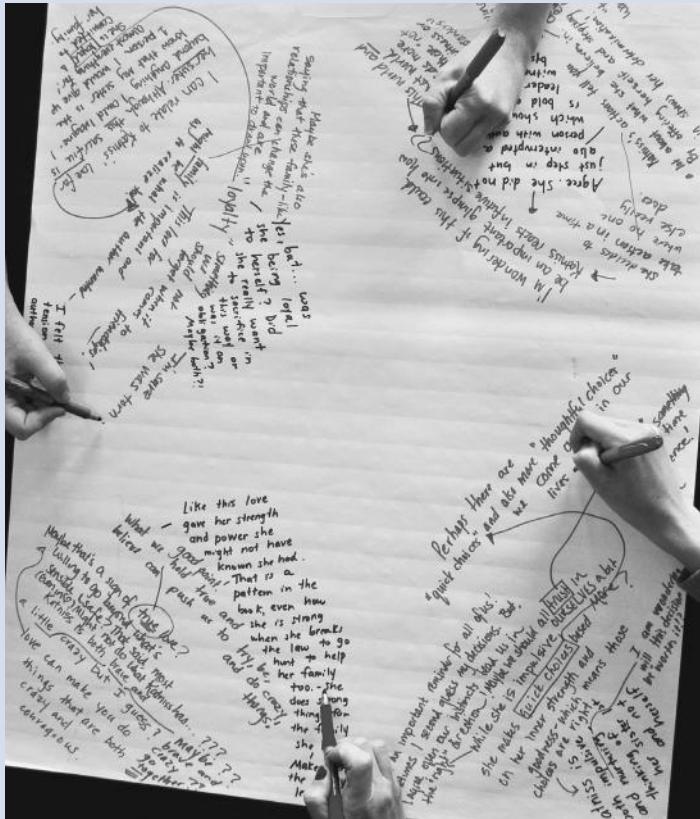
- Form opinions about specific characters and people in general
- Track characters' behaviors so we can learn how people's choices impact their lives
- Interpret characters' feelings and also the feelings of people in our lives
- Understand how characters' relationships impact their lives

Explore How:

- Show a short video clip of the scene from the movie. Tell the students to focus on what they think of the main character in this clip.
 - *For example, show a two-minute clip from The Hunger Games when the main character, Katniss, volunteers as tribute to save her sister.*
- After showing the video clip, divide the class into groups of four students and place a large piece of blank paper in between them. Students each move to a corner of the page where they will write down their opinion about the main character (for example, Katniss). Make sure to explain that this is a "silent conversation" and they will have time to talk later.
 - After about twenty seconds, prompt them, "Now list the parts of the video clip that impacted your opinion. What did Katniss do or say to give you this idea? Jot your thinking under your opinion." Give the students a minute to write.
 - Tell students to rotate the group's paper and read and respond in writing to what the first person wrote. If they agree, have them tell why. If they disagree, have them tell why. Give them about one minute to write a response. (You can connect this activity to commenting on a blog post as it uses the same skill set.)
 - Keep rotating every minute until all students are back to where they began. The final minute is time for the student who originally wrote the opinion to have the last word and respond to all the comments in that corner so far.

- After the “silent conversation” about the character, give the groups about ten minutes to look at each corner and discuss as a group what their opinions were.

Below is an example of one group’s silent conversation page.



Students read one another's responses and respond back in writing. Like a live blog, this activity helps students learn to build on or challenge one another's ideas about characters.

- After the group conversations, come back together as a whole class and create a class chart of opinions about the character. You can make this chart collaboratively by asking the members of each group to decide on one of the opinions from their paper that had the most evidence from the movie clip. They can write that opinion on a sticky note and share it with the class. The rest of the class can decide if there is sufficient evidence from the video to hang it on the chart.

Below is an example of a chart created about Katniss from *The Hunger Games*. Notice that, collectively, the opinions bust the notion that anyone can be defined by a single attribute.



A Few Tips:

- The page of writing offers students talking points and helps them prepare for what opinions are worth their time to discuss and really think about. For example, if a group had a comment in a corner that read, “She is a good character,” the students would likely not spend time discussing the idea because the comment was not compelling. Comments like “She is impulsive” or “She is overprotective” would give the groups lots to discuss and spark conversations that went into why and how and if they agreed or not. You can point this out to students.
- If you have younger students, they might need more time than one minute to record their ideas, but still keep it short so they focus on getting just the essential ideas down and they are excited to have a conversation off the corner of the page.
- When students use only a single word to show an opinion as these students did, we can teach them how to expand their thinking beyond a single-word label.

