Comparing/Contrasting Character Traits and the Approaches to Two Themes

In this lesson, students will compare and contrast character traits to determine the theme of the literary texts "The Enchanted Sticks" and "The Story of Wang Li." Students will then write a comparative essay in which they compare and contrast the approaches to the themes of the two stories.

Subject(s): English Language Arts
Grade Level(s): 5
Intended Audience: Educators
Instructional Time: 2 Hour(s)
Resource supports reading in content area: Yes
Suggested Technology: Document Camera, Overhead Projector
Freely Available: Yes

Keywords: character, theme, Junior Great Books, Chinese folk tale, Japanese folk tale, character traits, compare, contrast.
Instructional Component Type(s): Lesson Plan, Unit/Lesson Sequence, Worksheet, Assessment, Text
Resource, Formative Assessment
Instructional Design Framework(s): Direct Instruction, Writing to Learn
Resource Collection: CPALMS Lesson Plan Development Initiative

ATTACHMENTS
- Two_Approaches_Enchanted_Sticks.pdf
- Two_Approaches_Enchanted_Sticks_Answer_Key.pdf
- Two_Approaches_Wang_Li.pdf
- Two_Approaches_Wang_Li_Answer_Key.pdf
- Two_Themes.pdf
- Two_Themes_Answer_Key.pdf
- What_Trait_Is_This.pdf
- What_Trait_Is_This_Answer_Key.pdf
- Comparing_Approaches_to_Two_Themes_Scoring_Guide.pdf
- Character_Traits.pdf
- Drama_Theme_Planning_Guide.pdf
- Drama_Theme_Scoring_Guide.pdf

LESSON CONTENT
Lesson Plan Template: General Lesson Plan
Learning Objectives: What should students know and be able to do as a result of this lesson?
Using the literary texts "The Enchanted Sticks" and "The Story of Wang Li," students will:
- compare and contrast two characters in each text, both in groups of 3-5 and independently.
- use character traits to determine the theme of each text.
- compare and contrast the two themes independently.
- write a comparative essay comparing and contrasting the approaches to the themes using the two stories.
Prior Knowledge: What prior knowledge should students have for this lesson?

Students should know:
- how to identify character traits: look at what the character says, thinks, and does.
- how to identify the theme of a literary text, asking questions such as “What is the life lesson learned?” or “What is the message that would be helpful to know in everyday life?”
- how to compare and contrast elements of literature.
- how to cite text by putting the text in quotation marks with a page number.
- key words used in a comparative essay, such as “both,” “alike,” “the same as,” “however,” “whereas,” “on the other hand,” and “but.”
- the elements and structure of a compare/contrast essay.

Guiding Questions: What are the guiding questions for this lesson?
- How can you determine a character's traits?
- Why identify similarities and differences between characters?
- What are some themes you have come across in your reading?
- What are some ways to determine theme?
- Would you be able to determine the theme of a story without any characters?

Teaching Phase: How will the teacher present the concept or skill to students?

The “Hook” and Activation of Prior Knowledge

1. Ask the class, “What book are you currently reading?” Allow students’ responses. As each student responds, follow up with the statement, “Tell me about some of the behaviors of those characters, or character traits, from your book. Remember that character traits do not include physical descriptions.” Allow students’ responses.

2. Conduct a review of character traits by listening for adjectives about the character and drawing attention to them. As students mention an adjective, repeat that adjective and say, “That tells me a lot about the character's traits.” (Typically, for a fifth grade class, students’ understanding of character traits should be strong.)

3. Distribute the Character Traits handout. Go over the meaning of any words students do not know.

4. At this point, assess students’ understanding of character traits with What Trait is This. (Note those students who do not show mastery according to the What Trait is This Answer Key as they will comprise a small group during cooperative group work time later in the lesson.)

Introducing the Concept or Skill

1. Ask the guiding question, “How can you determine a character's traits?” Students' possible responses: things the character says, things he does, things he thinks.

2. Say, “Yes, to determine characters' traits, we need to look carefully at the things the characters do, say, and think. We will be practicing that together so that you can independently determine character traits.”

3. Ask the guiding question, “Why identify similarities and differences between characters?” Students’ possible responses: so you can see how different types of people respond to an event or if the same type of people respond in different ways, so you can see if the author is trying to make a point with one type of person reacting in a certain way to an event, to see if one type of person is more likely to change throughout the story, etc.

4. Say, “That’s true. Sometimes authors use characters to tell a character lesson or to send a message about how people should live their lives, and that’s called theme.”

5. Ask the guiding question, “What are some ways to determine theme?” Possible student responses: look at how characters react to situations, look at how characters change over time, look at how characters are treated by others, etc.

6. Say, “I hear you stating that characters are important in determining theme.”

7. Ask the guiding question, “Would you be able to determine the theme of a story without any characters?” Allow time for students' responses; provide lots of wait time as this is a thoughtful, open-ended question.

8. Ask the guiding question, “What are some themes you have come across in your reading?” Allow students’ responses. If there is not a large outpouring, then the teacher will have to spend time identifying and reviewing themes in familiar stories that students have read. Make a class chart of the list of stories students have mentioned and the themes of those stories.

Guided Practice: What activities or exercises will the students complete with teacher guidance?

Introducing the Activity

1. Distribute a copy of the “The Enchanted Sticks” to each student. (It is best to start with this text because they already studied “The Story of Wang Li” in the previous lesson, so it will be easier for them to do that analysis independently after the teacher modeling and group work in “The Enchanted Sticks.”) Read aloud as students follow along. At this point, the teacher is simply reading the text straight through so students can enjoy the uninterrupted flow of the story.

2. Say, “In order to compare the traits of these two main characters, Old man and Robber chief, and then determine a theme, we must first find evidence in the text about their personalities and the way that they react to events and record it on our graphic organizer. Once that is completed, it will be easy to look back at that evidence and pick out similar and different traits between the two.”

3. Say, “Take a look at Two Approaches - Enchanted Sticks. There are places to list evidence for the personalities and reactions to event for each character. It's important to include only those words or phrases that give us insight into the personality and how specifically the characters reacted to events.”

4. Perform a “think aloud” for section I. Students listen to the “think aloud” and take notes on section I of Two Approaches - Enchanted Sticks.

   - First I'll read aloud from the beginning, "Long ago in Japan, near the city of Kyoto, there was an old man who gathered wood in the forest. He picked up fallen limbs and sticks and traded them to the people of a nearby village for rice and tea."
   - Now I’ve got to ask myself, “Is there anything in that paragraph that tells me something about his personality or his reaction to an event? No.”
   - I will continue, “He lived in a small hut at the edge of the forest by the side of a stream. He caught fish with his bare hands and ate them with his rice. After his evening meal he would sit in his doorway, slowly sip his tea, and quietly enjoy the world around him.” I ask myself, “Is there anything so far that tells me something about his personality or his reaction to an event? Yes - he quietly enjoys the world around him. I will write this under personality because this is a frame of mind, not a reaction to something. I have to make sure to enclose it in quotation marks to show that I have taken the author's words and write the page number, p. 107.
   - I’ll pick up where I left off, “He listened to the stream flowing by and the breeze in the leaves of the forest. He smelled the scents of the flowers and grass and fresh water. He felt the air soft and delicate on his skin. One day when he was out gathering wood a band of twenty robbers jumped out from behind the trees. These robbers were both vicious and fearless. They respected no one and stole and killed without mercy.” I am guessing that the robber chief is part of this band of thieves, but I don't know that for sure (because he hasn't been introduced), so I better not put that down as evidence.
   - Continue, “The robber chief shouted at the old man and flashed his samurai sword. The old man bowed in greeting, but showed no fear.” That’s a character
trait, so I will write 'showed no fear' p 108 under Old man's personality.

- Continue reading, "Do you know who we are?" the robber chief asked. The old man nodded. "With this sword I could cut you into a thousand pieces to feed the crows, I could do that and it wouldn't bother me at all." There is a lot I can record here. I have to write "with this sword I could feed you into a thousand pieces to feed the crows" p. 108 under personality, along with "I wouldn't care at all" p 108 to show his personality.
- (Keep reading to the second to last paragraph.) The robber chief laughed and snorted. "Old man, that should have been you." So I must write "Old man that should have been you" p 108 under Robber chief's reaction to events, because he said this after he cut the lowest branches off the tree.

5. Say, "You now will be able to go through the remainder of the text deciding if there is evidence of the character's personality or the character's reaction to an event." Place students in groups of 3-5. Students will work cooperatively in heterogeneous groups of 3-5 to complete the remainder of section I. Circulate as groups are completing the remainder of section I to make certain they are citing text that either tells the characters' personality or their reactions to events.

6. For section II, those students who showed mastery of identifying character traits (What Trait is This) will work in heterogeneous groups of 3-5 on determining the similarities and differences between Old man and Robber chief. Those students who did not show mastery will work with the teacher to complete section II.

7. All students will work in heterogeneous groups of 3-5 to complete section III - determining the theme. As students work on section III, circulate and make sure students' responses are text-based and not opinion, and that their responses reflect accuracy of the text. (If one group is struggling, bring them back to the text. If there is widespread difficulty, conduct another whole-group 'think aloud' which reinforces using the text for the answers.

8. When groups have finished, call on each group to share their idea about what the think the theme of this story is. Decide as a class on the best response.

**Independent Practice: What activities or exercises will students complete to reinforce the concepts and skills developed in the lesson?**

**Part I**

1. Say, "We recently read "The Story of Wang Li" and I know you are very familiar with the text. But this time you read, instead of trying to figure out what the proverb means, pick out the words or phrases that tell you about Wang Li and Mother's personality and how they react to events. Then determine what character traits they have in common and those that are different." Use Two approaches - Wang Li Answer Key to assess mastery.

2. After students have completed Two approaches - Wang Li, say, "Now that we've determined the theme of both stories, you will compare and contrast them. In doing so, you'll have a better idea of what an author thinks about when and writing a story and ways they can teach a life lesson without coming right out and saying, 'The lesson of this story is...'

3. Distribute Two Themes to students to complete individually and explain, "This graphic organizer will help you as you write your essay comparing and contrasting the two themes."

**Part II**

1. Say, "Now you will write an essay comparing the two themes. You already know that you will be required to compare and contrast characters, settings, and events in a story or drama, which is relatively easy. You also will be required to compare and contrast stories in the same genre on their approaches to similar themes and topics. This is a bit more involved, because you're not just comparing the two themes, but rather the approaches to the two themes. This requires you to step into the shoes of the authors."

2. Continue, "You will write a five-paragraph essay that responds to the prompt: Write an essay to compare and contrast the approaches to the two themes in 'The Enchanted Sticks' and 'The Story of Wang Li'. Don't forget to use your graphic organizer!"

3. Distribute the Comparing Approaches to Two Themes Scoring Guide to students. Say, "I recommend that you write about each of the three components that make up an author's approach. So, after your introductory paragraph, you will compare and contrast the nature of the themes. Keep in mind that you are being asked to compare and contrast the components that make up the approaches to the theme."

4. Ask, "So when you are making a comparison, what key words should you use in your writing?" Students' possible responses: both, alike, the same as

5. Ask, "And what words would you use when showing a contrast in your writing?" Students' possible responses: whereas, on the other hand, however, but.

6. Say, "Do the same for the remaining two components: how characters are used to develop the themes, and how the theme is presented. Use your Two Themes graphic organizer to help you write. Remember to use key evidence from the text to support your writing. Don't forget to write a concluding paragraph at the end of your essay."

7. All students work independently for 45 minutes to write an essay comparing and contrasting the two themes.

**Closure: How will the teacher assist students in organizing the knowledge gained in the lesson?**

Review the strategies used to determine character traits:

- What does the character say?
- What does the character think?
- What does the character do?

Stress the importance of using the text to determine the traits, rather than prior knowledge and/or opinion. Say, "Once you've figured out the character traits of the characters in the story, you can ask, 'What is the message the author is trying to deliver?' Or 'What is the life lesson to be learned?' to determine the theme."

**Summative Assessment**

Students will show understanding of their study of character traits to determine theme by independently determining the theme in "The Story of Wang Li" after teacher modeling and support as well as collaborative group work on "The Enchanted Sticks." Furthermore, students will write a comparative essay to demonstrate the ability to compare and contrast the approaches to the themes of these two stories which will be assessed with the Comparing Approaches to Two Themes Scoring Guide.

**Formative Assessment**

After a review of character traits, the teacher must ascertain the extent of students' understanding of character traits. The teacher will do this by presenting the sentences from What Trait is This on the ActivBoard or an overhead and have students indicate with their ActivExpressions or dry-erase boards the trait that is being described. Those students who did not correctly identify the traits will receive small group remediation.

After students have worked together citing details about the characters on section I of their graphic organizer, the teacher will circulate and look at their organizers to assess the success of their efforts to come up with similarities and differences between the two men in section II. This will indicate the proper level of intervention needed, whether it is simply meeting with a group that is struggling or providing whole-class intervention if there is widespread difficulty.

By asking students if they can name common themes in literature, the teacher will be able to gauge students' understanding of theme and their familiarity with various themes. If there is not a large outpouring, then the teacher will have to spend time identifying and reviewing themes in familiar stories that students have read. If there are many correct responses, then the teacher can move directly to "The Story of Wang Li" and "The Enchanted Sticks" to determine the themes of those stories.

**Feedback to Students**

By looking at the ActivExpression (or the dry erase boards) of student responses on What Trait is This, the teacher can provide remediation to students struggling with
the identification of character traits. A paper copy of What Trait is This will be provided to each student, and the teacher will show them how to circle key words and phrases that give clues to the traits.

As students are working on section I of Two Approaches - Enchanted Sticks, the teacher will circulate around the room to assess students' completion of that portion of the graphic organizer, and will conduct a brief meeting with each group to make certain that students are on the right track. First, the teacher will make sure that all responses are text-based, rather than responses based on opinion or prior knowledge; redirection to select evidence directly from the text will be made. Second, the teacher will make sure the responses demonstrate accuracy, without which a successful interpretation in section II cannot be made; questioning techniques ("Where does it say that on page 107?" or "Did you copy that directly from the text?") can be used by the teacher to guide students into taking a second look at the text.

ACCOMMODATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Accommodations:
- Provide struggling students with Character Traits to use when completing section II of Two Approaches - Enchanted Sticks with the teacher and section II of Two approaches - Wang Li independently.
- Each student will have a copy of "The Story of Wang Li" however, struggling students' copies will have the evidence of the characters' personalities and reaction to events highlighted.
- Provide struggling writers with a writing frame for the essay.

Extensions:
- For students showing mastery of using character traits to determine the themes of the two stories, allow them to do the same with another story from Junior Great Books, "Mr. Singer's Nicknames" by James Kruss.
- Allow students showing mastery of theme to create a present-day drama that depicts one of the two themes. Use Drama Theme Planning Guide and Drama Theme Scoring Guide.

Suggested Technology: Document Camera, Overhead Projector

Special Materials Needed:
Teachers can find "The Enchanted Sticks" (Lexile 920) and "The Story of Wang Li" (Lexile 860) as part of Junior Great Books, Series 4, Book Two. All handouts, worksheets, and answer keys are attached.

Further Recommendations:
This lesson should follow Proverbs: From Understanding to Application - Using Proverbs to Create an Original Narrative.

SOURCES AND ACCESS INFORMATION

Contributed by: Gretchen Eidelbus
Name of Author/Source: Gretchen Eidelbus
District/Organization of Contributor(s): Sarasota
Is this Resource freely Available? Yes
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Related Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LAFS.5.RL.1.3:</td>
<td>Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAFS.5.RL.3.9:</td>
<td>Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAFS.5.RL.3.9:</td>
<td>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAFS.5.W.3.9:</td>
<td>Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature (e.g., &quot;Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or a drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., how characters interact]&quot;).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apply grade 5 Reading standards to informational texts (e.g., &quot;Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point[s]?&quot;).</td>
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