LESSON 4: Characters

MATERIALS:

- Character Passages: From *Ruby Holler, Hope in the Holler, Last in a Long Line of Rebels, Missing May,* and *Way Down Deep*
- Handout: Protagonist and Antagonist (1 & 2); Round and Flat
- Poster Paper
- Markers (or other writing utensils)
- Road to Publishing: Characters
- Word Wall Cards: **stock character, stereotype, protagonist, antagonist, round character, flat character**
- *Optional:* Fiction Fanatic Cards

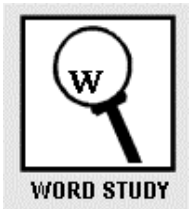
Literature is based on universal themes/characters/situations that embody the human experience and help us make sense of our own lives

OBJECTIVES:

- Read and demonstrate comprehension of fictional texts.
- Draw conclusions/make inferences about text.

Important Vocabulary:

- Stock character
- Stereotype
- Protagonist
- Antagonist

SEQUENCE:	**TEACHER NOTES:**
INTRODUCTION: Stock Character  Ask: *In our last class, we talked about* **characters—***what is the definition?* Either write the definition on the board or project it so that students can see it again. Explain: *Characters are an important part of fiction. We connect with the characters in the stories we read when we find things about them that are familiar. One of the ways that*	 **Character:** "A person portrayed in an artistic piece, such as a drama or novel" (*American Heritage Dictionary*)

authors can help readers connect with the story quickly is through the use of stock characters. Can anyone guess what a stock character is? If none of the students get the answer, guide them to the definition by connecting with familiar ideas--for example, ask them if they know how to use the word *stock*. If they talk about stocking shelves, ask them if there is just one box of every item on the shelf, or if there are lots—if you know about a favorite food item, use that (e.g., Lucky Charms). Explain that like there are multiple boxes of Lucky Charms, there are multiple characters that fit under a certain label. Therefore, stock characters are types of characters that are regularly used in fiction.  Add **stock character** to the Word Wall. Explain that **stock characters** are very similar to **stereotypes**. Stock characters appear over and over in different stories—they are a formulaic type. Since these character types are very predictable, they might also be called **stereotypes** because they are so familiar and simple. Stock characters often appear along with **motifs**, which also repeat.	**NOTE**: dictionary definitions of *character* specifically state "person," though over time the use of the word has evolved to allow animals or objects that have human characteristics to be considered characters, largely in animated films (e.g., *Finding Nemo*, *The Brave Little Toaster*)  Note which students do well and which students have more difficulty with the material in this lesson on the Terminology Guide, which combines how students participate in class with Formative Assessment 1, so you can use this information to group students later.
OPTIONAL: Stereotype and Motif ***This part of the lesson should be used if students did not recall stereotype and motif well on the Pre-assessment.** A **stereotype** is a character that is simple, usually described with one or two words. A **motif** is an important event or thing that occurs over and over in stories. Tell students that the word **stereotype** is a noun, which can be a person, place, or thing. Add the word **stereotype** to the Word Wall and write the following sentence on the board: *Stories often reinforce the stereotype of a beautiful princess.* Explain that a **motif** is also a noun, but it is a thing or an idea. Add the word **motif** to the Word Wall and write the following	 "A **motif** is a basic narrative element used in constructing a story. A simple tale may consist of a single motif. Tales typically include a number of motifs, which can be, and often are, used in more than one story." *(Folk and Fairy Tales: A Handbook,* D.L. Ashliman, p. 198)

sentence on the board: *Fairytales often use motifs, such as a peasant girl becoming a princess.* Explain that both **stereotypes** and **motifs** are meant to be familiar to readers to help them understand the meaning of the story. Then, explain that that **stereotype** can also be a verb (some words can be both): You can stereotype someone when you make an overly simplified judgment about someone. Explain to students: *stereotypes can be harmful because they can affect how we view people. Think about the stepmother in* Cinderella. *What kind of a character was she? Do you think after hearing that story they could stereotype all stepmothers as being evil? Would that be accurate?* *Stereotypes also go beyond stories. For example, if we have a stereotype that people from the city are rude, we might have a bad idea when we meet someone new from the city. The same goes with stereotypes about intelligence. For example, if we think girls are bad at math and boys are bad at English, it might let girls actually believe they aren't good at math, and boys might actually believe they aren't good at English.*  *This, of course, isn't true. Anyone who works hard enough can be good at anything they want. The brain never stops learning, so it's important that we don't lead others to think their abilities are limited by using stereotypes. Therefore, we shouldn't use stereotypes to limit someone or to spread negative images about a certain group of people.*	**Stereotype:** (*n*) A conventional, formulaic, and oversimplified conception, opinion, or image. (*v*) To give a fixed, unvarying form to. (*American Heritage Dictionary*)

APPLICATION: Stock Character

Ask: *Think about Harry Potter. Is he a stock character?* (Let students respond and guide them to the answer.) *No—he changes a lot throughout the series. He becomes a leader, he struggles with feeling pulled toward evil, he makes mistakes and learns from them.* A stock or stereotypical character would be instantly recognizable, like how Sven the reindeer in *Frozen* is a sidekick.

Have students think about types of stock characters they often see in literature for 1-2 minutes, writing down their thoughts on scratch paper. Then, have them pair with another student and compare lists for another 1-2 minutes.

Then, have all students share their responses and brainstorm a list of types of stock characters students might see as you read. Make sure to display the list so students can see (i.e., on a white board, projector, etc.)

Aim for 5-10 types of stock characters (e.g., princess, prince, villain, hero, sidekick, etc.).

Explain: *Now we are going to read a passage that includes stock characters. Listen carefully and read along. Take notes in your Writer's Notebook about what details make you think the character fits a certain type.*

Invite students to find a comfortable place for listening. Project the non-annotated passage from Sharon Creech's *Ruby Holler* on the board and read it out loud to students. When you finish, tell them to take a moment to look at it again.

Ask: *What stock characters do we see here?* (Students should note that Mr. and Mrs. Trepid are villains. They may suggest that Florida and Dallas are heroes, and you can discuss whether they have the "typical" hero traits that make them stock characters, or whether the way they stand up to the villains makes them different.

If you need a frame of reference, check out the list at https://screencraft.org/2018/07/09/99-archetypes-and-stock-characters-screenwriters-can-mold/

Your list does not need to be as extensive. Please note, many of these are not covered in typical children's literature and are, in fact, inappropriate for discussion with children.

If your students are Harry Potter fans, this blog post is a good resource to get the conversation started: https://www.mugglenet.com/2015/06/the-seven-most-common-characters-in-fiction-harry-potter-edition/

In the passages for this lesson, there are many power dynamics at play. In *Ruby Holler,* Florida and Dallas have to follow Mr. and Mrs. Trepid's orders because they are children under their care. In both *Hope in the Holler* and *Missing May,* the decision about where Wavie and Summer will live is being made by adults. You could have a good discussion about the agency each child character has and how the reader can tell whether or not they are being treated fairly.

ACTIVITY: Group Character Study

Explain: *You are doing a great job of talking about different types of characters, but there are other terms that we can use to distinguish different characters from one another.*

You are going to work in two groups and create posters to help us all learn some of these terms. Listen carefully to these steps.

First, I will hand out passages and an activity worksheet.

Show the students that you have two sets of passages for them to read--one that says "Protagonist and Antagonist" at the top, and one that says "Round and Flat" at the top. (You can choose either version of the Protagonist and Antagonist worksheet, or have students choose the one they prefer.)

Tell students: *Your job is to read the passages and think about how the listed character(s) fit together as a group. What do the characters have in common? Raise your hands when your group has decided why you think the characters fit the terms.*

Once I approve your characters, I will hand out poster paper.

First, you will fold your poster in half.

Write the title of one type of character (e.g., "Protagonist") *and the appropriate characters from the passages at the top of one half of the poster.*

Write the other type of character and the appropriate characters at the top of the other half of the poster. One group has protagonist *and* antagonist. *One group has* round *and* flat.

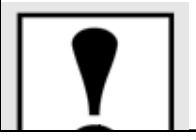
Work together to decide which other characters in your passage fit each of the definitions.

Write the characters' names and details about why they fit the definition on the poster in the column where they fit best.

Assign students to groups based on Formative Assessment 1. The lower scoring group will work on *protagonist v. antagonist.* The higher scoring group will work on *round v. flat.* Give the *protagonist v. antagonist* group Excerpts 2 & 3, and the *round v. flat* group the Excerpts 4 & 5. (*Note:* if you find the whole class needs more time with these concepts, you can have everyone work in small groups with Protagonist / Antagonist on one day, then have everyone work in small groups on Round/Flat the next class session.)

Students can read and think about their group's passages independently if they prefer and then come back with the whole small-group to share what they came up with.

You can tell students who the protagonist/ antagonist and round/flat characters are to make the activity move more quickly.



If you have a larger class (more than 15),

Are there any questions?

When a group has completed their definition, double check it for clarity and any misconceptions. Pay special attention to the protagonist/antagonist group, to make sure students understand that **protagonists** are not always good, and **antagonists** are not always bad. Have students come up with examples of "bad" protagonists and "good" antagonists (e.g., the Grinch and the Whos). For the round/flat group, have them think about what they think of with round and flat, and help them make the connection between these ideas and how it can apply to characters.

Give students about 10 minutes, walking around the room and helping as needed. When students are done looking for characters and writing about their second term, give them a one-minute warning to finish up.

When group work is finished, have each group present their terms and examples to the rest of the class, starting with **protagonist v. antagonist.**

Once each group has finished their poster presentation, ask the **round v. flat** group if they can identify the **protagonists** or **antagonists** in their excerpts.

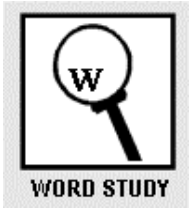
Ask the **protagonist v. antagonist** group if they can tell which characters are *round* and which are *flat*. See the annotated passages for detailed examples of each type of character (*protagonist, antagonist*, *round, and flat).*

Make sure that students understand that there are always identifiable protagonists and antagonists in short stories, but they may not be able to note round or flat characters as much because of the shorter length. When they write their stories, they will definitely have protagonists/antagonists, but whether they have round or flat characters will depend on how they write their stories.

Add **protagonist** and **antagonist** to the Word Wall.

you may want to split students into four smaller groups—just make sure the lower-scoring students have protagonist v. antagonist. If you have an uneven split (e.g., 10 students with higher scores and 5 students with lower scores) you can split the groups by term as well (i.e., one group looks at round and one group looks at flat).

As a full class, make sure students understand that *protagonists* are not always good, and *antagonists* are not always bad. The *protagonists* are just the lead characters--can they think of a book/TV show/game/movie where the lead character is not good? (e.g., *Maleficent, Despicable Me*). The *antagonist* is the character that opposes them.



Protagonist: "The main character in a work of fiction, as a play, film, or novel." (*American Heritage Dictionary*)

Antagonist: "The principal character in opposition to the protagonist or hero of a

	narrative or drama." (*American Heritage Dictionary*) **Round:** characters who are complex and undergo development, sometimes sufficiently, to surprise the reader (*www.brittanica.com*) **Flat:** characters who are two-dimensional in that they are relatively uncomplicated and do not change throughout the course of a work. (*www.brittanica.com*)
ROAD TO PUBLISHING: Characters Show the students Road to Publishing: Characters. As a class, decide how the excerpts from *Ruby Holler, Hope in the Holler, Last in a Long Line of Rebels, Missing May,* and/or *Way Down Deep* fit into this rubric. The idea is to expose students to the rubric so they will understand it for their process later in the unit.  If there is any time left after students complete this activity, allow them to fill out Fiction Fanatic Cards for *stock characters*, *protagonist*, *antagonist*, *round character*, *flat character*.	 Because you will likely not have time to apply the rubric to all the excerpts, we suggest you use the one from *Ruby Holler* since it was the class excerpt. Feel free to give students a choice, though. Because these are excerpts, the passages will often fall short of our "publishable" expectations—make sure you explain how the authors are on the right track, but that they have to be clear and consistent in order for their work to be published.