

Title

Main Characters and Me (featuring *New Kid* by Jerry Craft)

By Taylor A. Lucio and John Flanagan

- Ever felt like a story was written as though you could be the main character? Or that you couldn't relate to a single thing that the main character did or said? Either way, you're noticing the similarities and differences between a character's development and your own journey through life. One of the most important (and underrated) parts of engaging with literature is observing other people deal with conflict— and using that information to shed new light on your own struggles and victories. In this lesson, we'll be creating a "character arc" for our main character, Jordan Banks, as he goes through the process of finding where he belongs at a new school. Then, we'll create character arcs for ourselves, all the while taking note of the emotions, motivations, and characteristics of Jordan and ourselves. What we learn from this exercise will be different for all of us, but it will be *about* us as much as it's about the text.

Project Summary

- The lesson includes four sessions, each of which builds on the concepts of character traits and development over time with an emphasis on citing textual evidence.
 - In the first session, students will be introduced to character traits via the graphic organizer attached. It has four main areas: visual traits (especially helpful with graphic novels), values (i.e., what the character cares about and is motivated by), general traits and characteristics, and finally their interactions (how they treat and are treated by other people). They'll then practice identifying these concepts in an authentic context by creating one for themselves.
 - During the second session students will create two graphic organizers: one for Jordan Banks at the outset of the story and

one for Jordan Banks after his first day at his new school. Then, breakout groups will discuss Jordan's changes. They will support their ideas with evidence.

- The third session will introduce five points throughout the story to complete character profiles for: the outset, after the first day of school (Ch.3), going home for Christmas (Ch. 9), the cafeteria fight scene (Ch. 12), and the resolution. Students should already be familiar with the basic story arc of introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion, and will be given the option to choose their own five points throughout the story or to stick with the ones listed above. After completing the three remaining character profiles, students will begin working on the final product, a graphic organizer that shows the arc of the story and pairs their observations and textual evidence at each of the five points along the way. This will allow students to create a visually pleasing, organized way of showcasing how Jordan's visuals, values, traits, and interactions change throughout the story. Each of their observations will be supported with cited evidence.
- On the final day, students will have the opportunity to create a similar five-point character arc for themselves, as well as an opportunity to write a 1 to 2 page reflection on the similarities and differences between Jordan's experiences and their own. In doing so, students can expand on their empathic abilities and unpack how the power of storytelling and narrative can profoundly impact our notions of identity and difference.

Lesson Goal(s) and Objective(s)

- Students will practice identifying and supporting claims regarding a character's visual traits, values, characteristics, and interactions with others by creating a character arc with multiple points of observation and textual evidence both for the main character of our story and for themselves. Further, the students will engage in a reflection activity to take the idea of empathy through narrative to their next adventure in literature.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3](#)

Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.6](#)

Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.

Audience

7/8th grade English Language Arts students

Materials Needed

- Copies of Jerry Craft's *New Kid*
- 2 large sheets of butcher paper for each student
- Assorted Markers/Colored Pencils/Decoration Material
- Computers (if taught online)

Description of the Teaching and Learning Process

- In theory, whether it is taught online or in person, this lesson should take four one-hour-long sessions to complete. Students will be given copies of Jerry Craft's *New Kid*, ideally having time to read it prior to or during this lesson. Students will also try to discover some similarities and differences between the main character and themselves by identifying emotions and citing textual evidence.
 - On Day One, students will be given and taught about a Character Profile Template; the teacher will explain what the template is and introduce character development as a topic.
 - Day Two will consist of students creating templates for the main character, Jordan, at two different parts of the story, thus comparing his characteristics over time. On this day, students will also receive a primer on properly attaching claims about a character to textual evidence, e.g., what clues can be used to deduce what Jordan values in a certain moment, or how an interaction with another character can showcase a specific trait.

- Similarly, students will reach five points for Jordan on Day Three and use these points to build character arcs, which will help teach them the essential parts of character development. They should also start thinking of four to five points for themselves.
- Lastly, on the final day, students will put it all together by decorating their arcs and filling in evidence. Time permitting, students will write a one to two page reflection on the similarities and differences between themselves and Jordan.

Additional Information and Links to Resources Used (Optional)

- Graphic Organizer: Click [here](#) or see below.

The graphic organizer is titled "Character Profile Template". It features a large, empty rounded rectangle on the left side, labeled "Visuals" above it. To the right of this rectangle, there are three vertically stacked labels: "Values", "Traits", and "Interactions".

Showcase of Final Products

- **Disclaimer:** These exemplars were created by seventh graders, and as such, have been modified. For the sake of time, students have been focusing on “goals”, “conflicts” and “solutions” rather than the full gamut of “visuals”, “values”, “traits”, and “interactions”.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IOzDFdnsmQhCcvgws2ahgcZcl6y3oR6y/view?usp=drivesdk>

About Us

- John grew up in Minnesota, eventually fleeing to California for his undergraduate degree in English and Philosophy from Pomona College. He is now a first-year graduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he seeks to expand on his passions: literature, cycling, rock climbing, and frying eggs in the middle of his hashbrowns.
- Taylor A. Lucio is a first year graduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder. She is a Colorado native and speaks four languages. An excerpt of her novel called *Tapioca Pudding* was published in Journal Twenty Twenty. Her passions include studying new languages, writing, meeting new people, and teaching.

