

# DESCRIBING A CHARACTER

**RL.4.3. Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).**

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# DESCRIBING A CHARACTER

## TEACHER NOTES

RL.4.3, Lessons 1–3

### UNIT OVERVIEW

In this unit, students learn how to describe a story character in depth. To accomplish this goal, students determine the traits of and details about the character and then write a description from the character's point of view. This process of recounting vital details is a comprehension tool students can use for all stories they encounter in the future. Throughout the unit, read-alouds, drawing, discussion, and comprehension questions guide students in the process of creating a description of a character from a short story or novel.

**Lesson 1:** In this lesson, students identify the traits of the main character. You guide students in a discussion of the character and help them identify story details that describe the character. Students create a drawing of the character based on the story's details.

**Lesson 2:** In this lesson, students examine the character's actions. The class discusses how character actions are related to thoughts, feelings, and the actions of other characters. Then students complete a graphic organizer with the character's dialogue, actions, and feelings.

**Lesson 3:** In this lesson, students use the details identified in Lessons 1 and 2 to write a description of the character from the character's perspective. You use a minor character to model how to identify and connect story details to create an in-depth character description. Then students complete the process for the main character, writing a description from the character's point of view. You encourage students to think about ways to sound like the character when writing.

### Research Findings

“Visualization is a particularly useful strategy for younger readers and for narrative texts whereupon images of familiar situations can easily be evoked.”  
(McNamara, Ozuru, Best, & O'Reilly, 2007, p. 484)

### Lesson Strategies, Approaches, or Activities

In Lesson 1, students create drawings based on the story details about the character. This strengthens visualization skills when reading literature.

<p>“Self-explanation also helps readers to engage in elaboration, which involves relating the text content to what one already knows. This process plays at least two roles in facilitating deep processing of the text: (a) filling the conceptual gaps in the text and (b) integrating the text content into preexisting knowledge structures.”</p> <p>(McNamara, Ozuru, Best, &amp; O’Reilly, 2007, p. 484)</p>	<p>In all lessons, students explain and provide evidence of their thinking as they describe the character. This process helps students use explicit and implicit story details to form meaning. Students also make inferences from the text based on their pre-existing knowledge.</p>
<p>“Determining what the text says explicitly and implicitly, questioning, making inferences, and using textual evidence to support hypertextual, textual, and subtextual interpretations are all key components of close reading.”</p> <p>(Elliot-Johns &amp; Puig 2015, p. 26)</p>	<p>In Lessons 1 and 2, students find textual evidence to support their interpretations of the character’s physical traits and actions.</p>
<p>“Dramatic playing is a powerful and salient way of learning, experimenting, manipulating, knowing, placeholding, and representing our growing understandings of the world.”</p> <p>(Wilhelm, 1998, p. 5)</p>	<p>In Lesson 3, students pretend to be the character and write a description of that character from the first-person point of view.</p>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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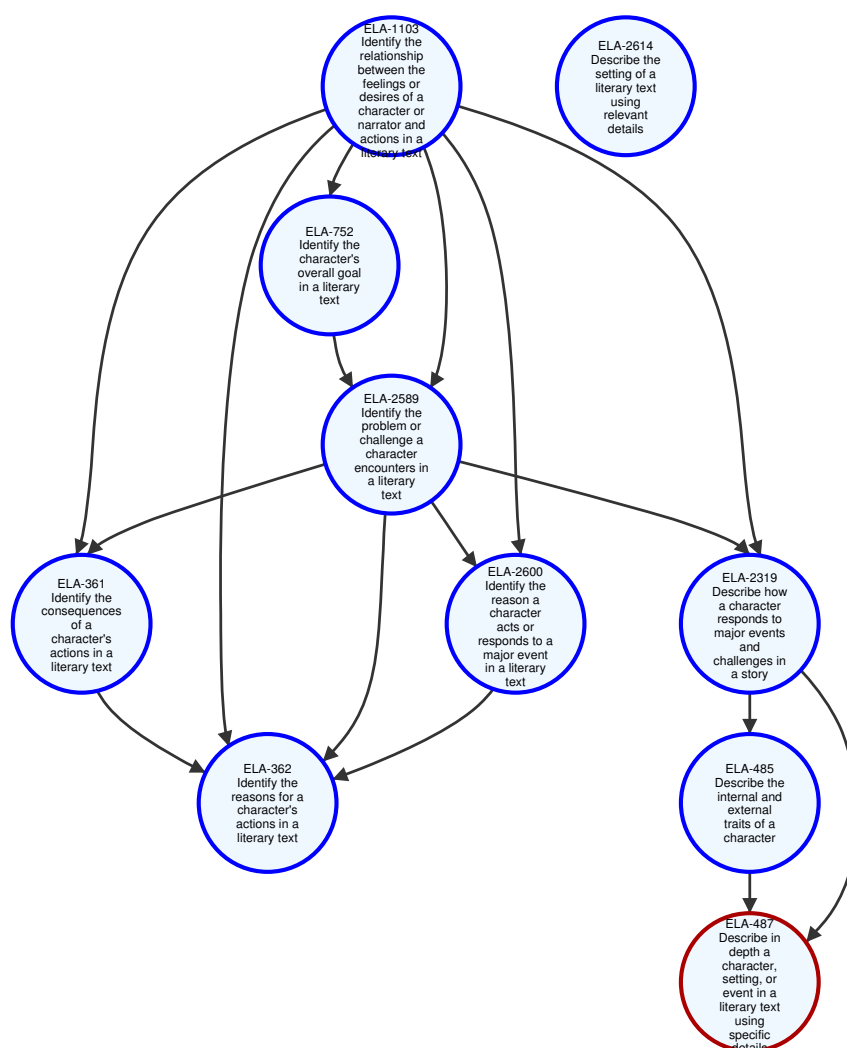
# DESCRIBING A CHARACTER

## LEARNING MAP TOOL

RL.4.3

### STANDARD

**RL.4.3** Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words or actions.)



*\*Learning map model for RL.4.3.*

Node ID	Node Name	Node Description
ELA-361	IDENTIFY THE CONSEQUENCES OF A CHARACTER'S ACTIONS IN A LITERARY TEXT	Identify the consequences resulting from the specific actions of a character in a story or drama.
ELA-362	IDENTIFY THE REASONS FOR A CHARACTER'S ACTIONS IN A LITERARY TEXT	Identify reasons for a character's actions as a result of events in a literary text.
ELA-485	DESCRIBE THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TRAITS OF A CHARACTER	Describe the internal (e.g., motivations, feelings) and external traits (e.g., appearance) of a character.
ELA-487	DESCRIBE IN DEPTH A CHARACTER, SETTING, OR EVENT IN A LITERARY TEXT USING SPECIFIC DETAILS	Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).
ELA-752	IDENTIFY THE CHARACTER'S OVERALL GOAL IN A LITERARY TEXT	Identify the overall goal that drives the actions of a character in a story or drama.
ELA-1103	IDENTIFY THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FEELINGS OR DESIRES OF A CHARACTER OR NARRATOR AND ACTIONS IN A LITERARY TEXT	Identify how a narrator's or character's actions make him or her feel, or identify how the narrator's or character's desires or feelings lead to a specific action in a story or drama.
ELA-2319	DESCRIBE HOW A CHARACTER RESPONDS TO MAJOR EVENTS AND CHALLENGES IN A STORY	Describe how a specific character reacts or responds to the specific major events and challenges he or she encounters throughout the course of a story.
ELA-2589	IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM OR CHALLENGE A CHARACTER ENCOUNTERS IN A LITERARY TEXT	Identify what hinders or prevents the character from reaching his or her goal in a story or drama.
ELA-2600	IDENTIFY THE REASON A CHARACTER ACTS OR RESPONDS TO A MAJOR EVENT IN A LITERARY TEXT	Identify why a character acts or responds in specific ways as a result of a major event in a literary text.
ELA-2614	DESCRIBE THE SETTING OF A LITERARY TEXT USING RELEVANT DETAILS	Describe the setting in a story or drama using the specific details that depict it.

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## CHARACTER APPEARANCE

### INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

RL.4.3, Lesson 1

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#### LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students use details from a text to describe a character's physical features.

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#### STANDARD

**RL.4.3** Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

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#### PREPARATION

Before the lesson, select a short story or chapter from a novel. The text should include descriptions of the main character's internal and external traits. *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, a novel by Grace Lin, or "Zlateh the Goat," a short story by Isaac Bashevis Singer, are examples of stories that will work well.

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#### MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ a short story or novel chapter
- ▶ chart paper or a white board
- ▶ **STUDENT HANDOUT: CHARACTER PORTRAIT**

Follow all copyright restrictions and guidelines as they pertain to material you select for classroom use.

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#### IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: "I can find details in a story that describe a character."

**Tell** students that today they will describe the physical features of the main character in a story.

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**Instruct** students to listen while you read the story. Direct students to pay attention to any details that describe how the character looks and to whether any of the character’s physical features affect story events.

**Read** the story to the class.

**Direct** students to turn to a partner and describe the main character. **Invite** pairs to share what they discussed, recording their answers on chart paper or a white board. Tell students that characters have features or qualities that make them unique.

**Say:** “The author’s descriptions create a picture in the reader’s mind of what the character looks like. Each reader may imagine a different picture, but the details will be similar.”

**Ask:** “Do the character’s physical traits affect the character’s actions or the story’s events?”

**Ask** students what parts in the story give the descriptions of the character. **Collect** answers on chart paper or the white board.

**Pass out** [STUDENT HANDOUT: CHARACTER PORTRAIT](#). Explain that students will first write the details from the text that give the character’s features. Then they will draw the character. For example, if the character has short, spiky black hair, students will write the sentence from the story that describes that feature and draw a character with that trait.

**Release** students to work with partners. They can discuss their findings as they work.

**Circulate** and collect evidence about student thinking.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING		
Determine if the student can <a href="#">DESCRIBE THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TRAITS OF A CHARACTER (ELA-485)</a> :		
▶ How does the character look?	▶ What physical features does the character have?	▶ Where in the story does the author describe the character's looks?

**Direct** students to exchange their handouts with a partner and explain what they drew. **Invite** students to share their drawings and story quotes with the class.

**Collect** or display the handouts to close the lesson.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the [TEACHER NOTES](#) for this lesson set.

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## CHARACTER PORTRAIT

### STUDENT HANDOUT

Lesson 1

**Directions:** Copy the author's descriptions of how the character looks. Then draw a picture of the character based on the story details.

#### STORY DESCRIPTIONS

1.

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2.

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3.

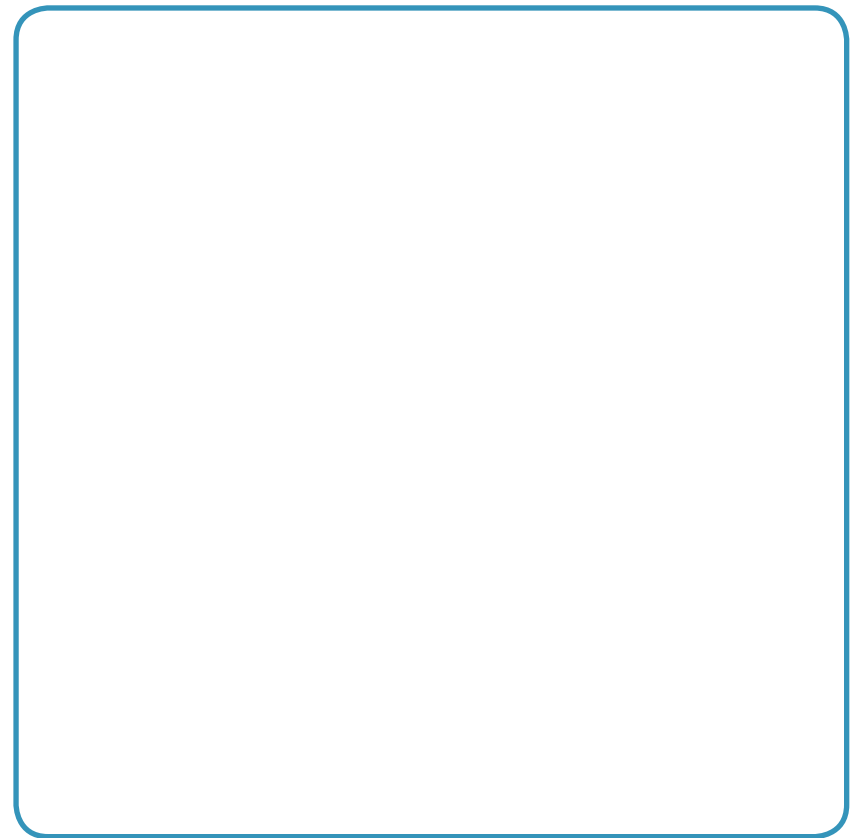
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4.

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# CHARACTER ACTIONS

## INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

RL.4.3, Lesson 2

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### LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students use story details to describe a character's actions.

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### STANDARD

**RL.4.3** Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

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### MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ the short story or novel chapter used in Lesson 1
- ▶ chart paper or a white board
- ▶ **STUDENT HANDOUT: CHARACTER ACTIONS**

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### IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: "I can describe how a character acts."

**Ask** students to think of their favorite superhero. **Ask** what physical traits or actions make him or her a superhero. **Help** the students brainstorm responses, referring to the hero's feelings, physical traits, and interactions with others. **Record** responses on the board or chart paper.

**Review** the previous lesson on physical traits. **Tell** students that the activity today will be to describe what the character does in the story and how the character acts toward other characters. **Explain** that a character's actions can result from the character's own thoughts and feelings. Their actions can also result from things other characters do. **Ask**: "What is an example of the main character of a story doing something because of what another character does?"

**Pass out** [STUDENT HANDOUT: CHARACTER ACTIONS](#), and **explain** the directions. Use a minor character in the story to **model** how to locate a character's dialogue, actions, and feelings in the story and complete the handout. For example, if you would describe the character as angry, where does the text show the character is angry?

**Explain** that students will work with a partner to identify the character's speech, actions, and feelings and write them on the handout. Release students to work.

**Walk around** and **ask** the Checking for Understanding questions.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING		
Determine if the student can <a href="#">DESCRIBE HOW A CHARACTER RESPONDS TO MAJOR EVENTS AND CHALLENGES IN A STORY (ELA-2319)</a> :		
▶ What words describe the character's actions or feelings?	▶ What does the character do in the story? ▶ How does the character act?	▶ Where does the story show this action or feeling?

**Ask** students to share with the class the details about the character and where they found them in the story.

**Collect** the handouts or display them for a gallery walk.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the [TEACHER NOTES](#) for this lesson set.

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## CHARACTER ACTIONS

### STUDENT HANDOUT

Lesson 2

**Directions:** Write what the character says, does, and feels. Also identify the story scene where you found each detail.

What does the character say?

“ ”

When?

What does the character do?

When?

How does the character feel?

When?

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# DESCRIBING A CHARACTER

## INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

RL.4.3, Lesson 3

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### LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students use story details to describe a character in depth.

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### STANDARD

**RL.4.3** Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

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### MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ the short story or novel chapter from the previous lessons
- ▶ a white board or chart paper
- ▶ **STUDENT HANDOUT: DESCRIBING A CHARACTER**

Follow all copyright restrictions and guidelines as they pertain to material you select for classroom use.

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### IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: "I can describe a character using details from the story."

**Explain** that today's activity will be to use the details from the story to write a description of the character from his or her point of view. Students will read their description to a partner while pretending to be the character. As the character, students will introduce themselves and share their thoughts and actions related to one event in the story.

**Review** the previous lessons about what the character looks like and does. **Explain** that today students will use those details to write a description from the character's point of view.

With a minor story character or familiar cartoon character, **model** the process on the white board or chart paper. First, **write** the name of the character. **Ask** students to describe how the character looks. **Collect** responses. **Ask** students to give examples of how the character acts toward others. **Write** responses on the board.

Next, **write** a description of the character in the first person as a sample for students. **Write** *I am*. Ask a student to give you a detail. Complete the paragraph by using other sentence starters, such as “I feel,” “I did,” “I like,” and “I dislike.”

**Pass out** **STUDENT HANDOUT: DESCRIBING A CHARACTER**. **Explain** that students will write the details they identified in the previous lessons and then write a paragraph describing one story event from the character’s point of view.

**Tell** students that all descriptions must be based on details from the story. Students should not make up details, but they can add details about why a character did something. For example, Superman could say, “When a building is destroyed, it is my job to save people.”

**Explain** that students’ descriptions should include both how the character looks and how she or he acts.

**Release** students to work, and **circulate** to check for understanding.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING		
Determine if the student can <b>DESCRIBE IN DEPTH A CHARACTER, SETTING, OR EVENT IN A LITERARY TEXT USING SPECIFIC DETAILS (ELA-487)</b> :		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ How does the character look?</li><li>▶ Where did you find that in the text?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ How does the character act or behave?</li><li>▶ Where did you find that in the text?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ What event caused the character to act differently?</li><li>▶ How did they act?</li><li>▶ Where did you find that in the text?</li></ul>

**Ask** students to find a partner to read their description to. Continue to walk around and ask the Checking for Understanding questions. Once both partners have read their descriptions, **ask** for volunteers to read their paragraphs for the class.

**Collect** the handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the **TEACHER NOTES** for this lesson set.

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## DESCRIBING A CHARACTER

### STUDENT HANDOUT

Lesson 3

**Directions:** First, write notes about the character based on story details. Then, write a description of the character from the character's point of view.

#### DETAILS

**Looks**

**Personality**

**Actions**

**Other Characters' Opinions**

## SENTENCE STARTERS

Hello, my name is

I am

I feel

I did

I like

I dislike

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## DESCRIBING A CHARACTER

### STUDENT FEEDBACK GUIDE

RL.4.3, Lessons 1–3

**Directions:** For each learning goal, circle the sentence that best matches what you can do.

Learning Goal	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<b>Describe how a character looks</b>	I can find a story detail that shows how a character looks.	I can find two story details that show how a character looks.	I can use story details to describe how a character looks.
<b>Describe how a character acts</b>	I can find a story detail that shows how a character acts.	I can find two story details that show how a character acts.	I can use story details to describe how a character acts.
<b>Write a description of a character</b>	I can explain in writing one detail about a character.	I can explain in writing two details about a character. I can explain something the character does in the story.	I can write a description of how a character looks and acts with details from the story.