



Character Education Infused English-Language Arts Lessons



The Hero: Writing and Responding

Grade Level: 9 or 10

Character Education Focus: Integrity, Responsibility, and Respect

Summary

This lesson is a culminating activity at the end of a unit, quarter, or semester. Collaboratively, students identify and discuss the heroic and non-heroic traits of characters from the literature in your curriculum. To prepare for writing an essay, students use a graphic organizer about a character whom they consider heroic and support their thesis with evidence from the text. In small groups, students are engaged in a “writing and responding” process to edit their essay. (Two to four 50-minute class sessions.)

Materials Needed

Any grade-level appropriate novels and other literature read during the year. This lesson presents examples from the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.

Academic-Character Education Objectives

Students will:

1. Identify heroic character traits that they admire and traits that inspire trust and result in service to others.
2. Identify the heroic traits of a character of their choosing and defend their reasoning using evidence from the text and a definition of a hero.
3. Reflect on their relationship to their communities, the role of *self-control* and *perseverance* in their own lives and their *respect* for individuals who have exhibited heroic characteristics in their lives.
4. Write a well-organized multiple-paragraph essay that includes a thesis.
5. Use graphic organizers to develop and support their thesis.
6. Practice responding to others' writing using an interactive process.

California English-Language Arts Content Standards Addressed

Reading

3.0 Literary Response and Analysis

- 3.5 Compare works that express a universal theme and provide evidence to support the ideas expressed in each work.

Writing

1.0 Writing Strategies

- 1.1 Establish a controlling impression or coherent thesis that conveys a clear and distinctive perspective on the subject and maintain a consistent tone and focus throughout the piece of writing.

2.0 Writing Applications

2.2 Write responses to literature:

- a. Demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the significant ideas of literary works.
- b. Support important ideas and viewpoints through accurate and detailed references to the text or to other works.
- d. Identify and assess the impact of perceived ambiguities, nuances, and complexities within the text.

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Lesson Procedures

Part One: Heroic Traits

1. Place students into groups of three or four. Assign roles if desired such as recorder (write group's ideas), reporter (shares group information with the class), and gatekeeper (ensures equal participation and provides encouragement). Ask students to recall their class readings and make a list of fictional and non-fictional heroes from these readings. The recorder can use chart paper or white board. Then students can expand beyond their readings to include contemporary, entertainment and personal heroes, as well.
2. Introduce several dictionary and literary definitions of a hero and tell students that they will have the opportunity to develop their own definition of a hero as well. It is helpful to post this list.

A hero is a person:

- of distinguished courage or ability, admired for his or her brave deeds and noble qualities;
 - with super-human powers;
 - who founds a nation or race;
 - who rescues his or her people;
 - who is admired and trusted by those he or she leads for *fairness, trustworthiness, compassion, wisdom, courtesy or self-control*;
 - who possesses an unusual talent that helps people;
 - who perseveres in the face of great trials or seemingly impossible obstacles;
 - who places the welfare of others above his or her own.
3. In their groups, ask students to talk about how each of the heroes on their generated lists matches or does not match the various definitions of a hero. Ask the reporter to share one example from their group and how the hero exemplifies the attributes of a hero.

Part Two: Preparing to Write

4. Remind students of the literary works they have recently studied and ask them to identify one of the characters who they might consider to be heroic. Encourage them to think of minor characters as well as major ones. Remind them that very few characters will fit everyone's definition of a hero and that well-developed characters have both strengths and weaknesses.
5. Then assign this essay prompt: *Think about the one character you selected as a hero. Identify both the traits that make this person a hero and the character's traits that are not heroic. Support your reasoning with examples from the text in a multiple-paragraph essay which includes an introduction, body, and conclusion.*
6. Lead the class in a review of essay format, including terms such as thesis statement, topic sentence, and transition words. You may wish to specify how the essay should be organized.

7. Introduce the graphic organizer below once they have decided how they will organize their essay and before they write their draft. A SEE chart (**S**ay it, **E**xplain it, **G**ive **E**vidence or **E**xamples of it) will help the students see the importance of both their abstract statement and the evidence from the text.
8. Students who are writing about a major character and hero about whom much is known may organize their information by heroic and non-heroic characteristics. For example, they may discuss Atticus Finch's *courage*, his *compassion*, his *fairness*, and his willingness to carry a burden for society, citing several examples of each in contrast to his lack of physical prowess and his reluctance to fight. Part of a SEE chart, organized by character trait might look like the chart below.
9. The opening statement of an essay organized by character traits could be crafted on this pattern: Atticus Finch in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a hero because he (here list characteristics of a hero in the order discussed in the paper) even though he (here list the ways in which he is not heroic- in the order in which the non-heroic characteristics are discussed.)

A SEE Chart Character Name: Atticus Finch		
Say it	Explain it	Give Examples or Evidence
Atticus is courageous.	<p>Atticus explained true courage to Jem when he told Jem about Mrs. Dubose, saying that courage is "when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and see it through, no matter what."</p> <p>Atticus shows courage when he takes the Tom Robinson case even when he had no chance of success.</p> <p>Atticus knows that he is taking a significant risk by taking the Tom Robinson case.</p> <p>Atticus puts himself in physical danger to protect Tom Robinson the night before the trial by going to the jail without a gun.</p>	<p>He knows he has no chance to win. "Are we going to win it?" "No, honey." "Then why" - "Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win," Atticus tells her.</p> <p>People shun him because of his act. Farmers coming into Maycomb gossip about the trial and refer to Scout and Jem by saying, "There's his chillun," and "Yonder's some Finches."</p> <p>Townspople warn Atticus about "trouble" when Tom Robinson is moved back to Maycomb. "You've got everything to lose from this, Atticus. I mean everything."</p> <p>Braxton Bragg Underwood was prepared to protect him with a double-barreled shotgun, showing that he knew the danger of the situation.</p>

10. If the students are organizing their paper by events, part of their SEE chart for Calpurnia might look like the one below.

11. Students can then craft a thesis statement based on this pattern: Calpurnia in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* shows the characteristics of a hero when she (here list the events discussed in the paper in the order in which they are presented). She shows (here list the characteristics that the events illustrate in the order discussed in the paper) even though she (here list the ways in which she does not seem heroic).

<p style="text-align: center;">A SEE Chart Character Name: Calpurnia</p>		
Say it	Explain it	Give Examples or Evidence
<p>Calpurnia shows physical bravery when she runs toward the Radleys’ house, which was toward the mad dog.</p>	<p>A mad dog could attack swiftly without logic or warning.</p>	<p>When she realizes the Radleys had no telephone, she chooses to leave the safety of the Finch house, run toward the mad dog and go to the front door of a house which was in itself uninviting and forbidding.</p>
<p>Calpurnia shows civic-mindedness when she ran to warn all her neighbors despite the racial difference.</p>	<p>Though the Radleys isolate themselves from Maycomb’s society, Calpurnia still considers their safety to be important.</p> <p>Calpurnia makes sure all the neighbors, who are white, are warned of the mad dog via telephone. All of them shut themselves inside their houses.</p>	<p>Scout says, “She’s supposed to go around in back,” showing that Scout is thinking of appropriate behavior for a Negro, while Calpurnia is concerned for the welfare of a neighbor, even a neighbor she does not know well or respect.</p> <p>She called the white telephone operator “Miss Eula-May” to “call Miss Rachel and Miss Stephanie’s phone on this street and tell them a mad dog’s comin’? Please ma’am!” She had to assure the operator she “knows a mad dog when I see one. Please ma’am hurry!”</p>

Part Three: Writing and Responding

12. After students have written a draft of their essay ask them to bring four copies of their typed draft to class. Using a process of Responding to Writing [link], each student will read his or her paper aloud to a small group of two or three peers, receive praise, ask questions of their listeners, and then receive feedback from their listeners. This process helps the writer learn about their own writing as well as other's writing. Each one in the group has a copy of the draft to read along.

The basic steps of the Responding to Writing process are as follows:

- a. **The writer reads** his or her paper aloud, perhaps making short notes in the margin as he or she hears difficulties with his or her own prose.
 - b. **The responders give specific praise.**
For example:
Your introduction is clear and indicates the order of your evidence.
You have a good explanation in the section where you say....
You have good examples in your section when you say....
Your conclusion summarizes your evidence well when you....
 - c. **The writer asks** specific questions for the group's response.
For example:
Do I have enough evidence to support (name a specific point)?
What ideas in paragraph (name specific) need more explanation?
Is there a place where I don't have enough evidence or examples?
Is there a place where I say something, give examples, but need more explanation?
Should I put my evidence in a different order where I say...?
Is there something I should add to show that my hero is really heroic?
 - d. Then (and only then) do the **responders give their suggestions.**
13. The students should revise their drafts and bring a final copy for proofreading. Students can share their final copies with one another. Teacher may have a closing discussion about what heroic traits they discovered in characters they were not aware of, and why it is important to have heroes in literature.

Academic-Character Education Assessment

Essays may be scored using the [California High School Exit Exam Response to Writing Prompt Scoring Guide](#) or a rubric of the teacher's making. Points can be allotted as teacher sees fit. The grade may include credit for completing each step of the writing process, including graphic organizers, rough draft, response and revision, and final draft.

The scoring rubric below can be used for assessing the content of any short writing assignment in response to prompts as well as the friendly-letter exercise found in the "Extension and Variations" section.

Ten Point Content Scoring Rubric for Writing in Response to Journal Prompts (and other short in-class writing assignments)	
10	A full, interesting response that shows real effort, an intelligent understanding of the prompt, sustained thought, the ability to communicate clearly and effectively, and a command of significant details, examples, and evidence
9	A full, thoughtful and appropriate response to the prompt that shows significant effort, and appropriate details, examples and evidence
8	A thoughtful and appropriate response to the prompt that shows effort using details, evidence or examples
7	A significant response that shows effort and thought, communicated with details, evidence, or examples
6	An appropriate response showing some thought and effort with limited details, evidence or examples
5	An appropriate response with some minor elaboration
4	Elaboration in response to the prompt with some details
3	Some elaboration in response to the prompt
2	Brief, general response to the prompt
1	A positive or negative answer without elaboration

Reflective Journaling Prompts

- Your hero shows *fairness, trustworthiness, compassion, wisdom, courtesy* or *self-control* at some point in his or her adventure. Recall a recent situation in your life in which you experienced conflict or had to make a difficult choice. Describe the situation and what you did or did not do. Now retell the situation with your hero playing your role. Would the situation have ended differently? Why or why not?
- Heroes think about others before they think about their own welfare. Describe a time when you put the needs of others before your own needs. Was it difficult to do? Why or why not? How did you feel after the experience was over?
- Most heroes are loved and trusted by their followers because the hero has worked or suffered for the people. Describe someone whom you love or trust who has worked or suffered for you. How did you learn to love or trust this person?
- In some works we can easily identify the heroes by their physical appearance, their costumes or even by the theme music. *Mighty Mouse* and *Superman* are examples. In other situations we discover a hero's greatness over time. What was your first reaction to the hero you have chosen to write about? Why? If you did not immediately recognize this person as a hero, what caused you to change your mind?

Extensions and Variations

Another Graphic Organizer

Students who select a minor character may organize their essay by describing three or four specific events or situations and explaining the heroic characteristics the events or situations reveal. For example, the graphic organizer example below describes what the mad dog episode in *To Kill a Mockingbird* shows about Calpurnia. Under each description of action or characteristic, identify and underline the character trait it reveals. Require at least three heroic actions and several non-heroic actions for each identified character trait. It is helpful if you can model the process, using the organizer below, by using one of the fictional or nonfictional characters already studied during the semester. Encourage students to use vocabulary describing such traits as *integrity*, *respect*, *responsibility*, *honesty*, *fairness*, *self-discipline*, *dependability*, *courtesy*, etc.

Character's Name: Calpurnia	
Heroic Actions or Characteristics	Non-Heroic Actions or Characteristics
<p>1. She runs toward the mad dog to warn the Radleys that a mad dog is coming (even though she does not like the Radleys and is not likely to be thanked for her efforts).</p> <p>She has physical <u>courage</u>. She has <u>integrity</u>. <u>She did what was right, even if she was not going to be thanked for it and even if she did not like the people being helped.</u></p> <p>2. She runs toward the mad dog to warn the Radleys that a mad dog is coming (even though she does not like the Radleys and is not likely to be thanked for her efforts).</p> <p><u>A hero brings something good to his or her community: civic-mindedness.</u></p> <p>3. She exercises significant <u>compassion</u> and <u>self-control</u> when she speaks in an African-American dialect to her friends at First Purchase even though she, as Jem points out, knows "it's not right." She explains, "It's not necessary to tell all you know. It's not ladylike."</p> <p><u>Courtesy, self-discipline, respect for others</u></p>	<p>1. She is not physically attractive.</p> <p><u>Heroes have physical beauty or special abilities.</u></p> <p>2. She is a servant, not anything heroic.</p> <p><u>A hero usually has or gains high status.</u></p> <p>3. She spanks Scout.</p> <p>A hero is <u>compassionate</u>.</p> <p>4. Scout says she did not treat her fairly.</p> <p>A hero is <u>generous</u> and <u>fair</u>.</p>

Responding Using the SEE Chart

A variation for part three of the lesson is to have students categorize the sentences in their essay drafts using the categories of the SEE chart on their copy before the Responding to Writing session. This process helps them critique their own writing and ask appropriate questions during the response session. Students can mark their drafts as follows:

- “Say it” elements: Underline each sentence that presents their idea (i.e., usually the thesis statement and the transition or topic statement of each paragraph).
- “Explain it” elements: Use a color highlighter, pink for instance, to mark each sentence that explains their idea. These would be the statements written in their SEE chart, above.
- “Example or Evidence” elements: Use a different color highlighter, such as blue, to identify all the examples and evidence included from the text.

Students should have more “explaining” elements (pink) than “say it” elements (underlined). They should have at least two times as many “examples or evidence” elements, highlighted in blue, than explaining elements. Once they have marked one copy of their paper, they are ready for the response session.

A Reflective Letter

Students can become more skillful responders if they reflect on the quality of their response and revision by sending you a reflective letter in friendly-letter format. In the letter the students can respond to these prompts: *Who responded to your draft? Which response questions helped you the most? What did you learn from your group members? What did you change after you received the group’s response?*

Family Journal Topic

Provide students with directions to interview a family member and record their responses in an ongoing Family Journal. This journal can connect parents and other family members to the student’s learning. It also can be used to engage families in the study of character traits illustrated in the literature that is read throughout the year. For this lesson, students can ask: *Who do you regard as a hero? What makes them heroic? Can you tell me a story about your hero that shows why you admire him or her?*

Teacher Notes or References

The literature will be different from teacher to teacher and this lesson is not contingent upon specific pieces. In my class, we read several short stories, including *The Miracle Worker* and *The Odyssey*. The more diverse the literature, the better. Each student finds his or her own hero, which is what I like about this lesson.

For a copy of the California High School Writing Scoring Rubric go to:
http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/sub_standards/Scoring_Guide_Essay.html

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