Grade 8

Sample Middle School Grade 8 Unit 5 Creating Dramatic Characters Learning Plan

Big Idea/ Topic

Creating Dramatic Characters

<u>Connecting Theme/Enduring Understanding:</u>
Exploring the connection between the theatre arts including performance with language arts and literature.

<u>Essential Questions:</u>
What is the difference between dramatic and traditional literary writing?
What are the steps of the playwriting process?
Why are dramatic characters necessary for a theatrical script?
How does formatting for a theatrical script differ from traditional literary writing?
What are the technical concerns of a script?
What are some methods used to develop scenes?

Standard Alignment

Creating
TA8.CR1: Organize, design, and refine theatrical work.
   a.   Identify and rehearse effective communication skills.
   b.   Investigate the role and responsibility of the cast and crew.
   d.   Utilize theatre vocabulary throughout the rehearsal process.

TA8.CR.2: Develop scripts through theatrical technique
   a. Create ideas for stories
   b. Analyze the theme and structure of a play.

Connecting
TA8. CN.1: Explore how theatre connects to life experience, careers, and other content.
   a. Compare and contrast theatre with other art forms.
   b. Articulate relationships between theatre and life.

Instructional Design

*This lesson has a flexible timeline but can be accomplished in 1-2 days.
This lesson is intended to reach students in a virtual setting, whether plugged or unplugged. See the bottom of the lesson for a list of unplugged supplies.

FOUNDATIONAL INFORMATION:
Plot structure, dramatic dialogue, theatrical genres, dramatic characters, and play formatting

CONCEPTS:
• The role of the playwright
• Strengthening plot structure

- Capturing unique character voice
- Dynamic Dialogue
- Writing a play
- The process of the playwright
- Establishing characters, conflict, and the path to conflict resolution.

VOCABULARY:
Relationship, character, importance, beats, objectives, tactics, conflict, moment before, plot, character, theme, lexicon, music, spectacle, plot structure, Freytag Pyramid, Exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement, dramatic dialogue, dramatic characters, dramatic structure, genres, scripts.

LINKS:
Dramatic Character Voice Video
Opening Lines and Characters from Photos PowerPoint

Part 1:
Student Journal Prompt:

Choose an improv game that allows the students to get their minds thinking about storytelling: (Story, Story Die is a good one for digital learning. http://improvencyclopedia.org/categories/Narration.html

Unplugged variation: Thinking about the Aristotelian element of Character have the student select a fairytale or cartoon and describe in their journal all of the character types that exist in the plot. What additional characters might exist in that world that are not currently in the story.

Part 2:
Presentation
In a live or recorded session present the information from the example lesson video, and the PowerPoint, on a synchronous digital platform such as Google Meet (How it Works: Google Meet), or create an asynchronous video of your own.

Sample Video:
Dramatic Character Voice Video

Use the character analysis and guidepost questions to interview a partner in class. Create a character analysis bio and brief guidepost description of a peer in class. This can be done digitally in breakout rooms or collectively as a class.

Unplugged Variation: Have the student read the information in the handout along with the slides provided in the unplugged packet. Students can interview a family member or answer the character questions about themselves. The student should be encouraged to ask questions about the process so the teacher can clarify prior to moving into the full assignment.

Part 3:
Student Assignment: (Select one of the two listed below)

Have the students watch the video or use the PowerPoints for the Opening Lines Scene Assignment and the Scenes and Monologues from Pictures Assignment to create your instructional presentation.
Opening Lines Scene Assignment and the Scenes and Monologues from Pictures Assignment Suggested

Video:
Opening Lines Scene Assignment and the Scenes and Monologues from Pictures Assignment

1. Opening Lines Scene Assignment
Student Instructions:
Choose one and write it as the first line of dialogue for a two or three-person scene.
- They're at it again. Listen to them.
- Come here a minute. I want to show you something.
- You shouldn't have done that.
- He didn't mean it.
- When will I see you again?
- It's not fair.
- Did you hear that?
- I don't understand what you mean.
- Can we talk about this?

Based on your opening line selection, make some definitive character decisions for each character you create using the character analysis questions.

1. What is your character's name?
2. What is your character's age?
3. What is your character's social position?
4. Describe your character's physical appearance.
5. Where does your character live?
6. What does your character like to do?
7. Name one thing that would make your character angry.
8. Describe a typical day for your character.
9. Describe a dream your character has had.
10. Pretend your character has a secret. What is it? Why is it a secret?
11. What is your character's goal?

The goal of this scene is to show the audience a relationship between characters *without using labels* ("mom," "sis," "boss," etc). Students should try to capture how people in different relationships and statuses speak to one another.

For the purposes of this exercise the Guideposts can be considered, but are not a necessary part of the assignment.

The scene should be a minimum of 1/2 page in length. Submit your scene when complete.

2. Scenes and Monologues from Photos Discussion:
Student Instructions:
Look through the pictures in from the Challenge Exercise in the Character Voice microlesson. Choose one that appeals to you in some way. Determine some quick facts about the photo. Describe your chosen character's personality, occupation, immediate goals, etc. Use the guidepost questions as an additional method of prewriting. Decide how this person speaks. Establish a conflict and **write a monologue or scene** that

features this character heavily. Look for opportunities to show their mastery of the character's voice. Stay focused on what the character wants in the monologue/scene and that the text has a clear beginning, middle, and end based on conflict.

Scene/Monologue Requirements:
- Proper Theatrical Script Formatting
- Clear Beginning, Middle, and End
- Evidence guidepost or character analysis questions in the text
- Distinctive Character Voices for all speaking characters

For both projects, there are multiple options for sharing the work and receiving feedback.
1. Have the students post their monologue or scene to a classroom forum and read and respond to two of their classmates' posts. They should comment on the effective use of language to clarify information about the character.
2. Synchronous Digital Platform sharing- The project could be shared on a digital platform reading the scenes aloud and offering immediate feedback from the class.

Unplugged Option: As a low-tech option, students can simply mail their scenes and monologues to the teacher. Copies of the Slide Deck from the presentation are included in the unplugged packet.

Evidence of Student Success
Diagnostic: Journal Entries/ Theatre Games **Formative:** Teacher Observation and Discussion during and after the presentation. **Summative:** Opening Lines Rubric, Characters from Photos Rubric

Distance Learning Supports
Ideas for Differentiation: Our goal is for all students to be actively engaged using the body, the voice, speaking, reflecting, and writing. Below are changes to the lesson to help achieve that goal for students who need additional support. or increased rigor. Note: Be careful using these lessons for all students. • Consider allowing students to record their thoughts in a variety of ways: using the talk to text/dictate feature, making an audio recording of their responses, drawing pictures, circling and/or labeling on their diagram or PowerPoint printouts, etc. • Students requiring a simplification will write simplified versions of the scenes or monologues. For additional simplification students could improvise scenes based on the assignment prompts rather than writing them out. • For low-tech and unplugged adaptation students can work one-on-one with teachers on the phone with focusing on a smaller assignments or oral improvised dialogue based on the newly created characters • For students needing an extra challenge, they can further develop both scenes in each assignment by expanding the length or continue with creating subsequent scenes based on the ones crated by the prompts.

Engaging Families
Materials included to support unplugged learners: Lesson checklist, Journal, printed PowerPoint slides, copy of lecture notes, assignment handout, copy of assignment rubric

Optional materials to support learning:

School Theatre: Acting Resources

Opening Lines and Characters from Photos PowerPoint

Lesson Checklist
Part 1:
- o   1. Complete the part I Journal Prompt

Part 2:
- o   2. Read, watch, or listen to the information about Character Voice.
- o   3. Interview a peer and complete the character analysis and guidepost questions for your peer.

Part 3:
- o   4. Read the opening line suggestions
- o   5. Select one line to spark your scene and create two character needed for the scene.
- o   6. Complete the character analysis questions for the characters.
- o   7. Write the scene using the characters you have created.
- o   8. Read examples from your peers and leave critical feedback comments on at least two.

or

- o   9. Look through the character pictures
- o   10. Select a character.
- o   11. Create some back story for the character and a conflict
- o   12. Write a monologue or scene that features this character with a clear beginning middle and end.
- o   13. Read examples from your peers and leave critical feedback comments on at least two.

Presentation Handout From Video:

A character's speech helps illustrate the character's personality. A pitfall for young playwrights is that all the characters in a play sound the same (often like the playwright).

Some common aspects of character dialogue that contribute to character voice include the following:

Common Aspects of Character Dialogue
- Length of speeches
- Length of sentences
- Characteristic fillers (y'know, like, um)
- Vocabulary level/word size
- Type of sentences: statements, questions, exclamations
- Inclusion of humor/irony/sarcasm
- Sentence structure/syntax
- Sentence integrity - whole or fragmentary
- Patterns and repetition
- Concrete or Figurative Language - idioms, similes, metaphors
- Use of facts or opinions
- Word choice
- Use of slang
- How emotional states affect verbal communication

The best way to learn more about what makes someone's speech sound natural and unique is research. Researching the way other writers, you admire create voice is a positive start -- but researching the written word should not be done in isolation. It is important to continue to observe the living world around you to make sure your characters will ring true.

Go to a public place and observe. Bring a notebook. Write down what you hear. Your impression of the word choices. Are the people speaking loud, diminutive, or funny? Do they have any repeated patterns, or do they use slang? Keeping a regular journal of research specifically focused on a conversation is an invaluable source for generating new content.

Research is only a part of the puzzle though. It is one thing to have a working knowledge of how people speak but making the right choices for your character can be daunting. It is often difficult to make consistent and effective choices about a character's speech if you don't have a clear sense of the character and their purpose.

To have clarity for who your character is and what your character wants you to need to make some decisions. One place to start is with a quick character analysis questionnaire. Actors use these frequently to flesh out the unwritten aspects of who their character is.

The following example is a great way to start deciding the life behind the character.

Character Analysis Questionnaire
1. What is your character's name?
2. What is your character's age?
3. What is your character's social position?
4. Describe your character's physical appearance.
5. Where does your character live?
6. What does your character like to do?
7. Name one thing that would make your character angry.
8. Describe a typical day for your character.
9. Describe a dream your character has had.
10. Pretend your character has a secret. What is it? Why is it a secret?
11. What is your character's goal?

Answering these questions helps to solidify some aspects of the character's backstory. The next step is to create a brief **backstory** or **bio** for the character. This doesn't need to be very long but having preexisting information about where this person came from and what life experiences shaped the way they see the world will make it easier to understand what choices they may make within the plot.

We all wear different masks with different people.
Michael Shurtleff's Audition provides actors with 12 guideposts that help the actor create specific choices about a character in a timely fashion. Writers can also get a great deal out of looking at some of Shurtleff's guideposts. Armed with the brief backstory and key questions about who the character is, the next element to consider is how the character engages with other characters and how they deal with specific situations. Answering the following 8 guidepost questions as the character will help to clarify how the character will function in the world as well as hone the internal monologue:

Guidepost Questions as to the Character

1. **Relationship** - How do interacts with others? Am I direct, nervous, flippant? Does it change depending on the person I'm speaking to? How?
2. **Conflict** - What am I fighting for? What is my dream and how can I make it come true? If there is no conflict, why don't you run?
3. **The Moment Before** - What was happening seconds before the scene started?
4. **Humor** - What do I think is funny. How do I use humor in general?
5. **Communication and Competition** - Who are you competing with and how do you communicate with them to get what you want.
6. **Importance** -What specific things will happen if I don't get what I want.
7. **Place -** What is my relationship with the location. Am I comfortable, formal, public, or private? Can people hear me? Do I want them to?
8. **Mystery and Secret** - Do I have a secret that no one knows. What do I want to keep hidden?

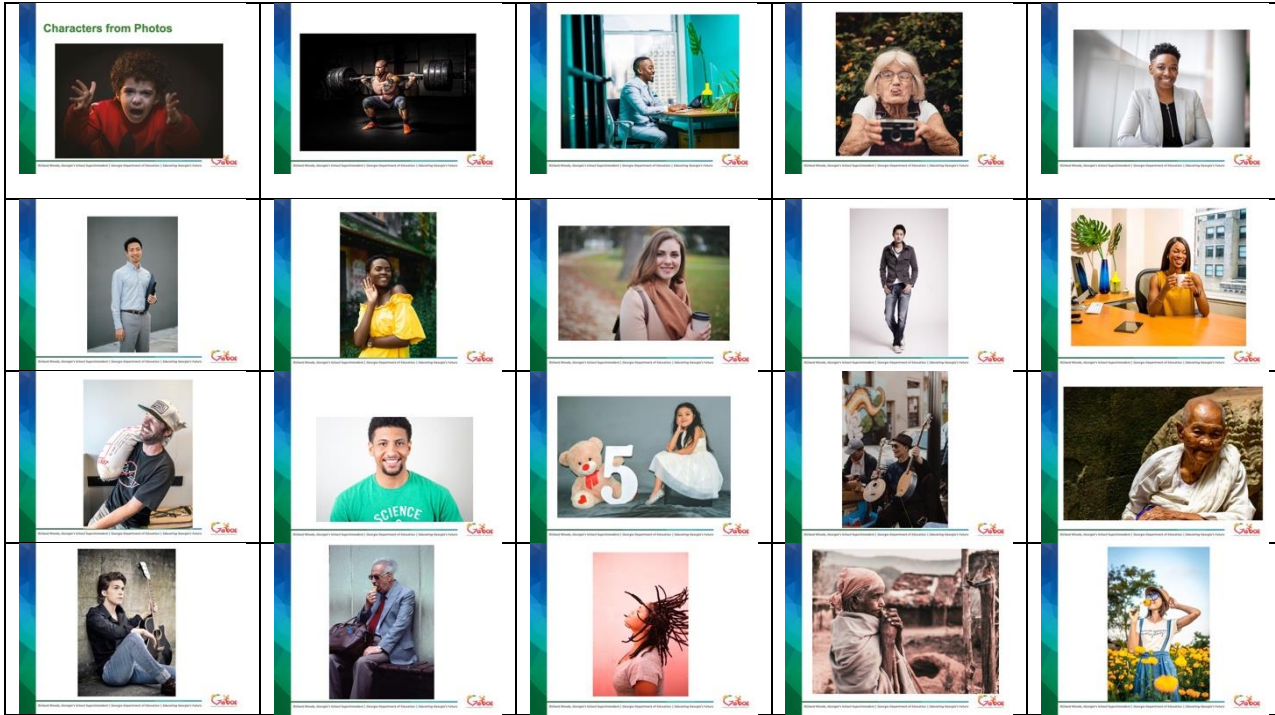PowerPoint Slides for the Opening Lines Scene Assignment:

Playwriting Opening Line Prompts

Opening Lines
- Choose just ONE of the following lines to be the first line in your scene.
- The goal of this scene is to create a clear relationship without using any names or labels ("Mom," "Grandpa," "Teacher," etc.)

Prompts
- They're at it again. Listen to them.
- Come here a minute. I want to show you something.
- You shouldn't have done that.
- He didn't mean it.
- When will I see you again?
- It's not fair.
- Did you hear that?
- I don't understand what you mean.
- Can we talk about this?

PowerPoint Slides for the Scenes and Monologues from Pictures Assignment:

Characters from Photos

Opening Lines Rubric

Criteria	Exceeds 20 points	Masters 17 points	Progressing 15 points	Needs Improvement 13 points	No Evidence 0 points	Criterion Score
Final Draft Document Mechanics and Formatting	No errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Theatrical formatting is correct.	Few errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. An attempt was made in style. Few errors in theatrical script formatting.	Several errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. An attempt made in style. Few errors in theatrical script formatting.	Careless errors, no proofing evident, some formatting errors/missing elements.	Riddled with errors or cannot read because lack of formatting interferes with comprehension.	/ 20
Script Structure	The script has a clear and effective progression. There is a clear and logical change from the beginning to the middle and from the middle to the end.	The beginning, middle, and end are clearly identifiable but have weak transitions.	The script has a beginning, middle, and end, but lacks a clear definition.	The script has elements of a beginning, middle, and end which help the audience understand the progression.	There is no distinguishable beginning, middle, or end.	/ 20
Evidence of Character research in dialogue	Dialogue reveals character, traits, personalities, conflict, mood, and is consistent with style and form. Feels authentic, consistent with character voice throughout script.	Dialogue consistently reveals character, traits, personalities, conflict, mood, and is consistent with style and form. Feels authentic, consistent with character voice throughout script.	Dialogue sometimes reveals character, traits, personalities, conflict, mood, and is sometimes consistent with style and form. It occasionally feels authentic and is sometimes consistent with character voice throughout script.	Dialogue rarely reveals character, traits, personalities, conflict, mood, and is not consistent with style and form. Does not feels authentic and is not consistent with character voice throughout script.	The character voice is generic for all characters and the dialogue does not reflect the given circumstances of the character or the conflict at hand.	/ 20
Unique Character Voice	Characters are dynamic and multi-dimensional and distinctive. There are clear internal and external motivations. The dialogue sounds natural and motivated based on the conflict at hand.	Most characters are dynamic and multi-dimensional. The audience can empathize with some of the character's situations.	Some characters are dynamic and multi-dimensional. The audience can empathize with some of the character's situations.	Characters are mostly one-sided and flat. Characters internal and external motivations are vague. The audience can perceive little into the inner workings of the character.	Character development is almost non-existent.	/ 20
Active Conflict	Conflict is driven by opposing forces, rooted in subtext and serves character and the story. Consistent throughout the script. Aspects of unique super objectives, obstacles, and tactics are the core of the dialogue.	Conflict is mostly driven by opposing forces, rooted in subtext and serves character and the story. Most of the time it is consistent throughout the script. Super Objectives, Obstacles, Objectives, and Tactics are clear throughout.	Conflict is weak. Dialogue is rarely driven by opposing forces, or rooted in subtext and does little to serve character and the story. Not consistent throughout the script. Obstacles and Objectives are clear, but tactics and character choices are not.	Conflict is almost nonexistent, but elements of character objectives and tactics can occasionally be found.	Conflict is almost nonexistent. Character objects cannot be determined.	/ 20
Total						/ 100

Photos from Pictures

Criteria	Exceeds 25 points	Masters 21 points	Progressing 19 points	Needs Improvement 16 points	No Evidence 0 points	Criterion Score
Final Draft Document Mechanics and Formatting	No errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Theatrical formatting is correct.	Few errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. An attempt was made in style. Few errors in theatrical script formatting.	Several errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. An attempt made in style. Few errors in theatrical script formatting.	Careless errors, no proofing evident, some formatting errors/missing elements.	Riddled with errors or cannot read because lack of formatting interferes with comprehension.	/ 25
Story Structure	The script has a clear and effective progression. There is a clear and logical change from the beginning to the middle and from the middle to the end.	The beginning, middle, and end are clearly identifiable but have weak transitions.	The script has a beginning, middle, and end, but lacks a clear definition.	The script has elements of a beginning, middle, and end which help the audience understand the progression.	There is no distinguishable beginning, middle, or end.	/ 25
Evidence of Character research in dialogue	Dialogue reveals character, traits, personalities, conflict, mood, and is consistent with style and form. Feels authentic, consistent with character voice throughout script.	Dialogue consistently reveals character, traits, personalities, conflict, mood, and is consistent with style and form. Feels authentic, consistent with character voice throughout script.	Dialogue sometimes reveals character, traits, personalities, conflict, mood, and is sometimes consistent with style and form. It occasionally feels authentic and is sometimes consistent with character voice throughout script.	Dialogue rarely reveals character, traits, personalities, conflict, mood, and is not consistent with style and form. Does not feels authentic and is not consistent with character voice throughout script.	The character voice is generic for all characters and the dialogue does not reflect the given circumstances of the character or the conflict at hand.	/ 25
Unique Character Voice	Characters are dynamic and multi-dimensional and distinctive. There are clear internal and external motivations. The dialogue sounds natural and motivated based on the conflict at hand.	Most characters are dynamic and multi-dimensional. The audience can empathize with some of the character's situations.	Some characters are dynamic and multi-dimensional. The audience can empathize with some of the character's situations.	Characters are mostly one-sided and flat. Characters internal and external motivations are vague. The audience can perceive little into the inner workings of the character.	Character development is almost non-existent.	/ 25
Total						/ 100