The Post-Mortem of a Protagonist

A Guide to Using the Student Resource

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This activity provides an alternate method of character analysis and can be adapted for use at different grade levels with any major literary character or historical figure. It requires students to make inferences about a literary character or historical figure and to support their claims with textual evidence in a format other than a written analysis.

This resource is included in Module 2: Understanding Text Complexity.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Divide students into groups of three or four and either assign each group a specific character or allow them to choose an appropriate character from the text. If you allow them to choose a character, remind them that they must select one that is significant enough that they can describe him/her using relevant and sufficient textual evidence. If all students are analyzing the same character, you might want to divide up the “body parts” among groups; if each group is working on a different character, you might have them find evidence for all or most of the “parts.”

Students will create a visual representation of a character or figure in a work they have read for class. Students will first draw a body outline like one they might see at a crime scene; they will then attribute various appropriate characteristics to specific parts of the character’s body. For example, students will identify a character’s dreams, visions, philosophies, and/or intellect and link textual evidence of those ideas to the character’s head;
they will link textual evidence of a character’s memorable sights to his eyes. You may provide a body outline such as the one included at the end of this resource guide, or you may want to provide butcher paper and ask students to create a larger figure, enabling them to add more textual evidence.

Alternatively, students may use the Glogster website (www.edu.glogster.com) to create a digital character analysis poster. If you use this method, students can be creative in their use of graphics, text, videos, and/or audio; however, it is important that they still include textual evidence in some form to support any assertions made about the character. A sample poster is available at http://csheilad.edu.glogster.com/character-study-atticus. This lesson could also utilize a variety of other Web 2.0 presentation tools. A list of presentation tools can be found at http://cooltoolsforschools.wikispaces.com/

When “post-mortems” are complete, whether digital or on paper, each group will present its findings to the rest of the class, a presentation that links nicely to CCSS Anchor Standard SL.5: “Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.”

This activity works well as a culminating activity or as a review at the end of a semester or a year. Students will earn points for fulfilling the requirements of the assignment and for aesthetics—neatness, illustrations, color, etc. Groups with the most appropriate textual evidence and most artistic effort earn the highest grades.
The Post-Mortem of a Protagonist
Student Resource

Instructions

Following your teacher’s directions, create an outline of a body to represent a character from ___________________________. Then find quotations or passages from the text to illustrate at least ____ of the following “body parts” for a post-reading “autopsy” of the character. Place these strategically on the body outline. Write the chapter and page number in parentheses after each quotation or passage. Group members should label the parts they work on, and all members should sign the project. Each group will present its “findings” to the class.

Body Parts

Head—Intellectual side of the character

What are his or her dreams? Visions?
What philosophies does he or she keep inside?

Eyes—Seeing through the character’s eyes

What memorable sights affect him or her? How?

Ears—Hearing through the character’s ears

What does he or she notice and remember others saying to him or her?
How is the character affected by what others say to him or her?

Nose—Smelling through the character’s nose

What smells affect him or her? How?

Mouth—The character’s communication

What philosophy does the character share or accept? What arguments or debates?

Arms—Working

What is the character’s relationship to work in general? To specific work?

Hands—The practical side of the character

What conflicts does he or she deal with? How?

Heart—The emotional side of the character

What does he or she love? Whom? How?

Torso—The instinctive side of the character

What doesn’t he or she like about himself or herself?
What does he or she hide?
What brings the character pain?
What does he or she fear? (Describe his or her “dark” side.)

Legs—The playful side of the character

What does he or she do for fun?
What are his or her hobbies or interests?

Feet—The character’s mobility

Where has he or she been (literally and/or figuratively)?
How has he or she been affected by travel or the setting?