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Understanding characterisation

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Activity introduction

Quick summary

In this lesson, students explore three short videos focused on youth gambling. They identify the themes of the videos and engage in subsequent exploration of character, focusing specifically on indirect characterisation.

Learning intention

To understand indirect characterisation.

NSW Syllabus outcomes

- **EN4-1A** responds to and composes texts for understanding, interpretation, critical analysis, imaginative expression and pleasure
- **EN4-3B** uses and describes language forms, features and structures of texts appropriate to a range of purposes, audiences and contexts
- **EN4-5C** thinks imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and critically about information, ideas and arguments to respond to and compose texts

General capabilities

Critical and creative thinking

Literacy

Ethical understanding

Personal and social capability

Relevant parts of Year 7 and 8 achievement standards

NSW Stage 4 English Syllabus Statement

By the end of Stage 4 students respond to a variety of texts critically, imaginatively and interpretively and compose accurate, clear and coherent texts. They use English in personal, social and learning contexts with increasing control and understanding of the form and features of language and structures of texts, and with increasing awareness of purpose, audience and context. Students make connections between texts, they recognise the main ideas and points of view, and the ways in which texts seek to position responders. They make decisions about whether content and language are appropriate to purpose, audience and context.

Students who have achieved Stage 4 respond to literary and other texts for enjoyment and to expand their perspectives on their own lives. They engage with images of their real and imagined worlds and explore the relationship between them. They explore texts critically, evaluating content, differentiating between fact and opinion, challenging points of view and identifying, considering and appreciating cultural expressions. They respond to imagery and symbolism in verbal and visual forms. They engage with print, film and digital texts with an informed awareness of the language forms and

Activity introduction

features and structures of those texts. Students develop personal preferences in what they hear, read and view, and are able to articulate their preference in personal and critical responses.

Australian Curriculum Year 7 Level Description

They listen to, read, view, interpret, evaluate and perform a range of spoken, written and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is aesthetic, as well as texts designed to inform and persuade. These include various types of media texts including newspapers, magazines and digital texts, early adolescent novels, non-fiction, poetry and dramatic performances. Students develop their understanding of how texts, including media texts, are influenced by context, purpose and audience.

Literary texts that support and extend students in Years 7 and 8 as independent readers are drawn from a range of realistic, fantasy, speculative fiction and historical genres and involve some challenging and unpredictable plot sequences and a range of non-stereotypical characters. These texts explore themes of interpersonal relationships and ethical dilemmas within real-world and fictional settings and represent a variety of perspectives.

Australian Curriculum Year 8 Level Description

They listen to, read, view, interpret, evaluate and perform a range of spoken, written and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is aesthetic, as well as texts designed to inform and persuade. These include various types of media texts including newspapers, magazines and digital texts, early adolescent novels, non-fiction, poetry and dramatic performances. Students develop their understanding of how texts, including media texts, are influenced by context, purpose and audience.

Literary texts that support and extend students in Years 7 and 8 as independent readers are drawn from a range of realistic, fantasy,

speculative fiction and historical genres and involve some challenging and unpredictable plot sequences and a range of non-stereotypical characters. These texts explore themes of interpersonal relationships and ethical dilemmas within real-world and fictional settings and represent a variety of perspectives.

Topic

Character development

Unit of work

Stage 4 English

Time required

80 minutes

Level of teacher scaffolding

The level of teacher scaffolding in this lesson will vary based on the amount of prior knowledge students have relating to analysis of theme and character. Additional resources have been provided which can be used to explicitly teach specific concepts if students are unfamiliar with them.

Resources required

- [Video: Youth Gambling -headspace Rockingham \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Video: Characterization in Literature \(YouTube\)](#)
- Class Worksheet 'Whole Class Characterisation Discussion'
- 'Characterisation Student Worksheet'
- Learning Intention Display (optional)

Keywords

Theme, character, characterisation, direct characterisation, indirect characterisation, gambling, impact, effect.

Teacher worksheet

Teacher preparation

This lesson has been developed as the first session in a pair of lessons exploring indirect characterisation. Lesson 1 focuses on developing an understanding of this concept, while Lesson 2 allows students to apply this understanding through development of a script. It is recommended that these two lessons are implemented together to optimise learning.

Gambling

This lesson focuses on the exploration of theme and character through example texts based around the risks of gambling. Given that gambling can be a high-risk activity and is a priority concern for young people it is recommended that teachers and parents read the Facilitator Pack before implementing the lesson. The pack provides teachers and parents with essential information about gambling harm amongst young people and clarifies the nature of gambling-related behaviours as well as how to approach sensitive topics.

Theme

This lesson assumes a prior understanding of theme and the ability to identify themes within texts. Supplementary references are provided within the lesson if students have not yet developed this skill. Identifying themes in a text requires students to be able to identify a focus subject or topic within a text, and the comment made about that theme. All theme statements should be a full sentence that expresses the idea or opinion on a topic as represented through character experiences and events within the text. If you wish to develop your understanding of theme, explore the resources below:

[Home of Bob: Fiction, it's story elements, and quality characteristics](#)

[Literarydevices.net: Theme](#)

[Writing Explained: What is Theme? Definition, Examples of Theme in Literature](#)

Characterisation

The central focus of this lesson is indirect characterisation. Students explore how the personality of a character is represented in the text through speech, thoughts, effect on others, actions and looks (appearance). It is important to have a strong understanding of characterisation prior to implementation of this lesson. If you wish to explore this concept further, some resources you may wish to explore are included below:

[Writing 101: Guide to Direct Characterization and Indirect Characterization](#)

[Grammarly: What is Indirect Characterization in Literature?](#)

Learning intention

To understand indirect characterisation.

Success criteria

Students can:

- understand that the theme in a text is shown through character experiences.
- explain direct and indirect characterisation.
- identify indirect characterisation in a text.
- make intentional choices to develop reader and viewer understanding of a character through use of indirect characterisation.

Teaching sequence

- 5 minutes - Lesson introduction
- 35 minutes - Part A: Identifying theme
- 30 minutes - Part B: Characterisation
- 10 minutes - Reflection

Lesson introduction

Display the learning intention and success criteria for the lesson. This can be written onto the board, or the included resource can be displayed. Invite students to read and discuss the learning intention and success criteria to ensure understanding before beginning the lesson.

Part A:

Identifying theme

Step 1

Begin the lesson by showing each of the three scenarios in the video [Youth Gambling - headspace Rockingham](#). After each video, invite students to discuss the content and messages. Encourage a range of perspectives, prompting students to think critically and reflectively about their viewpoints and those of others, drawing on evidence from the text and their broader experience to support their thinking.

Note: This video contains commentary between each scenario, it is recommended that these elements are not shown to students, so that they have the opportunity to form their own thoughts and perspectives without influence.

Step 2

Invite students to consider that the three videos were published together as a package by Headspace Australia.

Using the Think-Pair-Share approach, ask students to consider the following question:

What is the central theme of the collection of videos?

Think: *Students record their own notes about what the theme is*

Pair: *Students share their ideas with a partner and add to/adjust/elaborate upon their original thinking*

Share: *Students are invited to share and discuss their ideas as a class*

Encourage critical discussion about the potential theme, prompting students to provide evidence to support their assertions. Actively engage in the discussion with students, using the think aloud method to model how your perspective can change and develop throughout the discussion as new perspectives are shared.

Note: This step requires students to have an existing understanding of theme and how themes can be identified within a text. If students do not have this prior understanding, you may wish to explore or share selected videos from the following list before completing this stage of the lesson.

Theme videos

[How do I determine the theme of a book?](#)

[How to Find the Theme of a Story](#)

[The only way you will ever need to teach theme](#)

[How To Find a Theme](#)

Step 3

Provide students with time to record their own theme statement for the collection. This will be referred back to later in the lesson, as characters are explored.

Part B:

Characterisation

Step 1

Redirect the class discussion about theme to character, emphasising that ultimately it is the actions and experiences of the characters in the text that present the theme. Identify that in each of the scenarios viewed there was a character who was gambling, and there were close associates (either friends or family) around them impacted by their choices and behaviour.

Show the first scenario (0:53-4:00) again. After watching, invite the class to describe the central character who has been involved in gambling. Record a character description on the board to refer back to.

Step 2

Invite the class to consider how the character is shown to be this way. What are the factors that give the audience this information about the character? Allow for a brief discussion and then explain to the class that the way in which an author, writer or director builds an understanding of a character's attributes is called characterisation.

Step 3

Show the video [Characterization in Literature](#)

Step 4

Display the resource 'Whole Class Characterisation Discussion', and complete the table together, identifying the indirect characterisation for the central character in the scenario being discussed. An example of how this table may be completed is shown on the next page.

Character description (already on board)

The gambler in this video is shown to be acting in a preoccupied and selfish manner as a result of the anxiety caused by his gambling. He has lost sight of the bigger picture and does not consider the negative impact of his choices on both himself and those around him, focusing only on managing his gambling habits.

Indirect characterisation (Appendix 1)

	What we see in the text...	What we can infer about the character...
Speech	<p>He states things as being better than they are, suggesting things are okay when they are not.</p> <p>He is not honest with his friends.</p> <p>He says to the coach: “I can’t believe I have done this to him, he’s my best friend”</p>	<p>The character feels ashamed of or embarrassed about his actions.</p> <p>He does not want to be like this.</p>
Thoughts		
Effect on Others	Coach is worried and wants to help.	He is generally a likable person with people around him who care, and the gambling is making him act in a way that isn’t really himself.
Actions	<p>When hanging out with his friends, he is not really participating with them, he is on his phone, betting. He is detached from them and the experience.</p> <p>When hanging out with his friends, he is shaky and jittery.</p> <p>When all of his friends are excited about the end of the game, he is slumped back in his chair looking disappointed or worried.</p> <p>Steals money from his friend.</p>	<p>He is distracted. He is withdrawing from his relationships.</p> <p>He is feeling anxious and worried.</p> <p>He is not finding joy in things he normally would. Gambling is having a negative impact on him.</p> <p>He is putting his own needs and worries ahead of his values and friendships. He is desperate.</p>
Looks	<p>Often looking downward.</p> <p>Wearing beanie and jacket at game, when others are in t-shirts.</p>	<p>He is feeling worried or ashamed.</p> <p>He is withdrawing from social contexts.</p> <p>He is hiding from the world.</p>

Note: Given this is a video and there is little insight into character thinking, there may not be observations for this element. Although, students may suggest observations about character’s thinking.

Step 4

Provide students with the 'Characterisation Student Worksheet' and allow time for students to complete the same form of character analysis for Scenario 2 and 3, focusing on the girl who is gambling, and the son respectively.

Step 5

Once students have had time to complete their analysis, share and discuss students observations, focusing on each of the listed categories.

Reflection

Invite students to discuss why it is important to understand indirect characterisation. Explore the following questions:

- Why is indirect characterisation important?
- How do direct and indirect characterisation impact the reader or audience differently?
- When might you apply your understanding of indirect characterisation?

To conclude the lesson, allow time for students to respond to the final prompt on their worksheet:

Is indirect characterisation important when developing a narrative text? Why?

Differentiation

Extension - Students who quickly and confidently identify characterisation in the text can be encouraged to develop a more formal description of character. They can create a written response in paragraphs to explain the character and how they were developed through the text.

Provision for Learning Support - Students who find it challenging to identify theme and characterisation independently can be encouraged to work collaboratively with others in the class able to support them. Alternatively, they can be positioned close together in the classroom so that they can be supported as a group during independent work times.

Whole class characterisation discussion

1. Watch the first scenario from [Youth Gambling -headspace Rockingham](#) showing the footy friends.
2. As a class, develop a description of the character who is gambling.
3. Complete the table based on this character to identify how indirect characterisation has been used to develop this character.

Indirect characterisation

	What we see in the text...	What we can infer about the character...
Speech		
Thoughts		
Effect on Others		
Actions		
Looks		

Characterisation student worksheet

Learning intention

To understand indirect characterisation.

Success criteria

Students can:

- understand that the theme in a text is shown through character experiences.
- explain direct and indirect characterisation.
- identify indirect characterisation in a text.
- make intentional choices to develop reader and viewer understanding of a character through use of indirect characterisation.

Task instructions:

For the two remaining scenarios in the video [Youth Gambling - headspace Rockingham](#), identify how indirect characterisation has been used to develop the audience's perception and understanding of the selected character.

Scenario 2: Casino games

Complete the table below, focusing on the character who is gambling in this video.

	What we see in the text...	What we can infer about the character...
Speech		
Thoughts		
Effect on Others		
Actions		
Looks		

Scenario 3: Gambling in the family

Complete the table below, focusing on the son in the family.

	What we see in the text...	What we can infer about the character...
Speech		
Thoughts		
Effect on Others		
Actions		
Looks		

Reflection

Is indirect characterisation important when developing a narrative text? Why?

Learning intentions

To understand indirect characterisation.

Success criteria

I can:

- Explain direct and indirect characterisation.
- Identify indirect characterisation in a text.
- Make intentional choices to develop reader and viewer understanding of a character through use of indirect characterisation.