



# Living Characters



## Essential Question

Why are strong choices essential to interpreting a drama or theatre piece?

## VOCABULARY

portray  
physicality  
personality  
trait

## Materials List

- No special materials needed

## Pacing

2-3 sessions

## Assessment

### SUMMATIVE

Students will portray a character.

## Elements of THEATRE

- IMITATION
- ENERGY
- ACTION

## CONTENT Standard

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.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).

**Additional Standards Addressed:**  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7

## ARTS Standard

### TH:Pr4.1.4b

Make physical choices to **develop** a character in a drama/theatre work.

**Additional Standards Addressed:**  
VA:Re8.1.4a

## 21st Century Skills

- Creative Thinking
- Critical Thinking
- Collaboration
- Initiative

## Lesson Objective

Students will work in pairs to develop the physicality of a literary character or historical figure.

## Lesson Overview

A key to helping students understand depth of character is visualization. When visualization is paired with physicality, that understanding soars to new heights. This lesson ask students to create a physical character, but in order to do so, they will need to thoroughly understand that character as evidenced by details in the text.



## Artful Thinking Routine

### Circle of Viewpoints routine

Have students look at the artwork [A Sunday on La Grande Jatte](#), by Georges Seurat.

1. Brainstorm a list of different perspectives.
2. Choose one perspective to explore, using these sentence-starters:

*I am thinking of... the topic... from the viewpoint of... the viewpoint you've chosen*

*I think...describe the topic from your viewpoint.  
Be an actor—take on the character*

*A question I have from this viewpoint is...ask a question from this viewpoint*

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STEP

1

## Introduction

Ask students to make a list of their favorite book characters. Put the name of each character on a post-it note. After just a couple of minutes, make a line plot on a wall in your classroom with the post-its, with one end of the line being “Extremely Strong Personality” and the other end being “Weak or Mild Personality”. Ask students to place their characters where they fall on the line.

Chances are, the majority of characters chosen will lean towards the Strong Personality end. Simply put, those are the characters we remember the most, and have clear pictures of in our minds.

STEP

2

## Character Description

Choose a character that you and your students are familiar with, that has a strong personality and physicality. This character will serve as a model for the next steps of the lesson.

*\*\*For the sake of this lesson plan, the character being modeled will be “Miss Trunchbull” from [Matilda](#). Feel free to substitute another character that fits better within the work you have been doing in your classroom.*

Read the detailed character descriptions of Miss Trunchbull (found in Chapter 7). If possible, provide students with a copy of these paragraphs so that they are able to mark up the text and highlight the most important details.

After reading the descriptions, ask students to use two different colors to mark up the text. One color should note the personality traits given, the other color should be for physical traits.

Alternately, if you are unable to provide students the text to mark up, give students a copy of the included table for them to record details. This is also a great way to work on listening skills, but may require you to read the text aloud multiple times.

Look at the different traits. Do the personality traits lend themselves to the physical traits and vice versa? Connect these traits on the master chart.

Ask students to draw a sketch of the character based on their observations. Paying attention to the physical traits will likely help them the most. How can they convey that character?

Sketching can help students visualize and understand a character. Another option in place of sketching the character would be to have students strike a pose as the character.



## Physicality

Talk with students about what actors need to do in order to become characters (highlight favorite characters students have already mentioned as portrayed in movies or on television).

Pose the question, "How does an actor use their body to portray a character?" Allow a brief discussion around this.

Have students stand up, with a little space between the, Show students [Drama Lesson 1 " Creating a Character's Physicality](#). Have them participate in real time with the video, pausing as needed for more time. It is also helpful to pause after each character and ask students, who might that character be? (That can be hypothetical - not a character they already know.)

After going through the video, follow some of the same methods and create a physical portrayal of Miss Trunchbull (or your chosen character).

**\*\*** This will likely be silly in the beginning, and that's okay for the first few minutes. Then you should ground students in. Ask them to really think about what they now about the character to help them portray a realistic physicality.

## Main Activity

Students will now go through the same process for a character of their choice.

They will want to choose a strong character, for which they have access to a detailed description for the character. (Some students may need help with this - you could also provide a bank of characters to choose from.)

For their chosen character, students will analyze the details for both personality traits and character traits, filling out the provided resource chart. Students can draw a sketch of their character and then should begin to experiment with the physicality they envision their character having. It may seem logical to students to begin talking like the character and create voices. Try to discourage them from this. They should only be creating the physical movements of the character.

**Estimated Time: 1-2 sessions**



## Teacher to Teacher

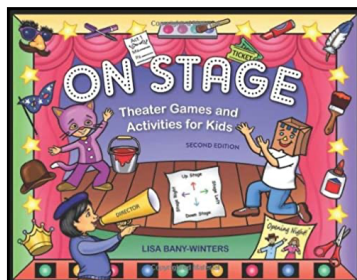
- This could also be done with partners. If using partners, pair up your quiet students, or those who may be hesitant to “perform” with your more outgoing students who are willing to perform without hesitation. Partners could either develop two separate characters that will interact with each other or work together to perform one character which will be performed by one, while the other reads the description.
- This lesson could also be done using historical figures and text about the figure rather than a literary character.
- For students that may need an extra challenge, have them create a character. They will do this by first writing a descriptive paragraph which introduces everyone to the personality and physical traits of this new character.

## CLOSURE

Ask for volunteers to “perform” their character. Read the description of the character to the group while the student performs. After each performance, ask the group to share what was a strong choice to see as an audience member. Then ask for ideas of what could help the character come to life even more.

# Literature Connections

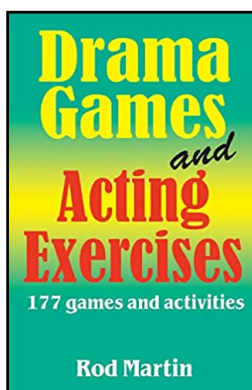
Your other favorites:



## On Stage: Theater Games and Activities for Kids

*Lisa Bany-Winters*

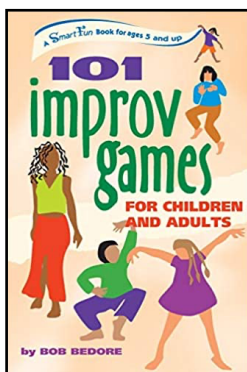
A must own book to find fun ways to bring the world of theatre to your classroom. These easy, fun activities will encourage collaboration, spark creativity and build confidence.



## Drama Games and Activities

*Rod Martin*

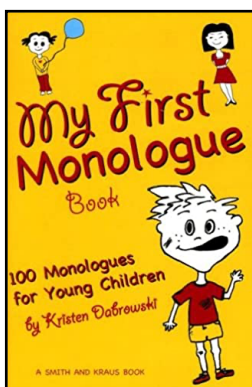
Almost 200 quick and interactive drama games that can be built into your classroom in a variety of ways. Build a safe zone for taking risks in our classroom.



## 101 Improv Games

*Bob Bedore*

Improv encourages imagination, collaboration and teamwork. These games can be used across curricular areas, but will also help students in this lesson put themselves in the shoes of another person.



## My First Monologue Book

*Kristen Dabrowski*

This can provide another way of having students bring physicality to a character, and would be excellent for higher level students. Reading only a monologue of a character asks the reader to infer and to answer questions based on verbal

By using the links on this page to purchase the books listed, we will receive a small commission as an affiliate. We only recommend books that are high quality, have been used in our own classrooms, and which have direct connections to this lesson.



# Living Characters

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Listen to the description of the character *your teacher reads to you*. Record details about that character below.

CHARACTER NAME \_\_\_\_\_

PHYSICAL TRAITS	PERSONALITY TRAITS



# Living Characters

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Create a sketch of the character your teacher read to you using the details you have observed.

**CHARACTER NAME** \_\_\_\_\_



# Living Characters

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Find descriptive details for the character *you have chosen*. This is most often found the first time you meet the character in the book. Record details about that character below.

**CHARACTER NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

PHYSICAL TRAITS	PERSONALITY TRAITS





# Living Characters

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Create a sketch of the character you have chosen using the details you have observed.

CHARACTER NAME \_\_\_\_\_



# Living Characters

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_

Excelled (what areas were exceptional work for the student)	Proficient	Basic (what areas could the student show improvement in)
	The student is able to 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).	
	The student is able to make physical choices to develop a character in a drama/theatre work.	
<b>NOTE:</b> Consider the planning and process shown by the student		