



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2011 Volume I: The Art of Reading People: Character, Expression, Interpretation

Taking a Role in History: Reading Biography with Empathy

Guide for Curriculum Unit 11.01.10, published September 2011

by Gretchen Wolfe

Primary students frequently identify characters and their traits in the fiction they read. This unit is designed to expand students' understandings of character beyond the stories they read to include a better understanding of others and themselves. The primary focus of this unit will be analyzing character while reading about four significant American historical figures using biographies. Character analysis enhances the reader's understanding of a character's actions and the events that occur in a story. By analyzing the character of a historical figure in a biography, the reader can construct a deeper understanding of the actions and motivations of the person as well as the significance of those actions on the events of that time in history.

The secondary focus of this unit is developing empathy in our students. One must empathize in order to achieve a deeper understanding of a person. While reading the biographies the children will participate in role-taking activities to develop their understandings of others. The children will read, write, draw, use graphic organizers, and role play to "become" the characters in history!

(Developed for English Language Arts, grade 1; recommended for English Language Arts, grades 1-3)

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