

My Dog is as Smelly as Dirty Socks

And Other Funny Family Portraits

By Hanoch Piven

Want an inspired new way of teaching your class to look at people and make character observations? This book uses a creative approach in teaching students of all levels to look at people in a new way. A young girl has been asked to draw a picture of their family. But her ink drawing doesn't convey her family member's personality, the way she wishes. So, she uses objects to specifically show her family.

English/Language Arts

- Ask students to create a portrait that describes someone, whether real or imaginary/literary, using all five of the senses; sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. What flavor best represents this person's sense of humor? Does the person have a cherry limeade personality, or is the person more of a dark chocolate type? What texture describes your individual?
- Using imagery and mood, write a short essay describing yourself.
- Introduce similes to students. Have them create similes describing themselves. Provide each student with an adjective and have them create a simile describing that word and then have them illustrate their simile.
- See other curriculum ideas below. Many ideas will work well in both language arts as well as other subjects for a terrific cross-curricular lesson.

Social Studies

- Talk to your students about the physical traits they use to describe a person. (Brown hair, tall, slender, chubby, etc.) Discuss various attributes that are or were considered beautiful in different times, cultures and countries. For example, some African tribes consider long necks with rings around them as extremely attractive. During Queen Elizabeth I's reign, because the queen had a receding hairline, women plucked their foreheads to push their hairline back. What trends are considered fashionable today? Do these styles reflect a person's inner personality?

Art

- Students can draw a character, of course, but character traits may fit into many creative products. For example, students may sculpt a character in clay or other medium. Students may create a collage that represents the character. Abstract ideas can even be connected. Students can weave an abstract design that represents a character.
- For a specific collage idea that also connects with language arts concepts, have students cut out words and phrases from magazines and newspapers that represent a character they wish to describe. Students may cut out an outline of a face, neck, shoulders. Then they glue the descriptive words and phrases over the basic form, moving the words and phrases around to form a pleasing design before they glue them in place.

Music

- If we describe people using objects to represent their personalities, what different instruments reflect those same traits? Maybe a cymbal represents excitement or a sweet, single note of a recorder represents peace. Have students make their own personality song using 5 personality traits. Present a personality concert at the end of class.

Theatre Arts

- Place a variety of objects that are different sizes, colors and textures out where your students can easily see them. Hand one object to each student and have that student describe a fictional character based on their object. For example, if I was handed a fuzzy dice, I would say I was a risk taker (dice), a friendly person (fuzzy), and like to stand out in a crowd (red fuzzy dice are not commonly found in cars today).

Character Lessons

- Make a picture showing one of the character traits. You can allow children to choose their trait, or pick one for them to illustrate. For example, Gratitude might consist of a picture of smiley teeth (thank-you), two babies hugging (appreciation), and a cornucopia (for thanksgiving).
- Have your class make up fashions that reflect a specific personality trait. Examples could be, someone who likes to laugh always wears a tie. You could have a variety of costumes available to students, and they could ‘dress up’ to show their personality. You could end in a fashion show of character.

Technology

- Have students create a power point about themselves using 5 objects that describe their personality. Have each student create a slide showing each object and a short description of each item. Then, have their final slide being a cumulative picture including all of the objects. Students could also add in sound clips to create a multi-dimensional portrait.
- Have students choose a famous person. Have them come up with 5 personality traits about that person that they see based on the person’s picture only. Then, using the internet, research a person to find 5 additional traits they didn’t know about. For example, Angelina Jolie could be considered vain by her appearance. However, she loves children (she has adopted 3 children) and is a philanthropist to areas of need (she lives in Louisiana to help bring the economy back and has made numerous trips to Africa to bring awareness to fighting AIDS in that country).