



INSIGHT HUMANITIES™

**STUDYING CHARACTER
DEVELOPMENT IN
CHAPTER BOOKS**

Rising Grade 3

Sample Lesson

A Novel Study Unit Adapted from Lavinia Group's
Insight Humanities™ Curriculum

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PURPOSE: WHY STUDY CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN CHAPTER BOOKS?

In many respects, second graders have developed into “real readers” who read “real books,” an incredibly rewarding transition for students and teachers. When they entered second grade, most students were beginning readers (around F&P level I/J/K), reading heavily illustrated books in which each chapter is a self-contained episode (*Poppleton*, *Frog and Toad*). By the time they enter third grade, students are expected to be reading early chapter books (around F&P level M/N), which are much longer and denser and have significantly fewer illustrations (*The Magic Tree House*, *Nikki and Deja*).

This is a big jump! To successfully navigate this transition into third grade, students must be able to hold on to the plot and trace character development through a much longer book.

This summer experience will support students in developing the stamina, the reading fortitude, and the avidity to uncover meaning, not only in each chapter but throughout the entire book. Students will understand how each chapter connects, developing the author’s key ideas throughout the book. This is challenging but rewarding work!

Through this summer unit, students will develop a more sophisticated understanding of how characters change and grow. They will experience how getting to know a character over the course of a longer chapter book is like

getting to know a friend over several playdates, with each conversation and interaction providing insight into the individual’s traits, values, and perspective.



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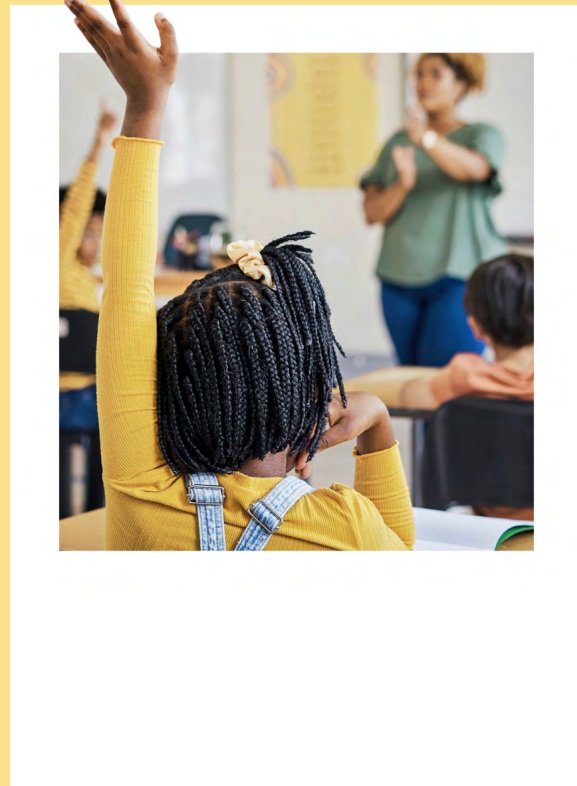
The unit begins with *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World* by Mildred Pitts Walter, a realistic fiction book in which 10-year-old Justin’s ideas about stereotypical gender roles are upended, and he learns about the rich history of Black cowboys during a memorable summer spent on his grandfather’s ranch. This is followed by *The Year of the Dog* by Grace Lin, in which the relatable protagonist, Pacy, narrates the events of the Chinese

Year of the Dog, the year she hopes to “find herself.” Students will get to know Justin and Pacy as well as if they were sitting next to them in the classroom.

Throughout the unit, kids’ love of books and their confidence in themselves as readers and writers will continue to grow—intangible benefits they will carry with them into third grade and beyond.

Connection to the Insight Humanities™ Scope and Sequence

This realistic fiction unit connects to the Insight Humanities™ yearlong content focus, “Diversity and Cultural Heritage,” with two excellent Read Alouds. *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World* by Mildred Pitts Walter is set on a ranch founded by Justin’s great-great-grandpa, an African American who had been enslaved, thus highlighting a setting and culture rarely seen in children’s literature. Along with Justin, readers will learn about the rich history of Black cowboys. But this book is not historical fiction: Justin is a regular contemporary kid with realistic problems, providing a mirror and a window for many readers.



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In *The Year of the Dog* by Grace Lin, the narrator asks, “How come Chinese people are never important?” pointing out the lack of representation of Asians and Asian Americans in media. Worse, when she does

find a Chinese person in a book, it is an outdated, stereotypical depiction. “But I wanted a real Chinese person book... One with people like us—Chinese Americans.” Though the narrator, Pacy, explores her identity as a Taiwanese American, students from many backgrounds will understand her yearning to see herself represented, to feel “important” in mainstream American culture and media.

As students read *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World* and *The Year of the Dog* and engage in rich discussions, they will explore the following themes:

GENDER ROLES:

(*Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World*) Justin, encouraged by his friend Anthony, has embraced some outdated, stereotypical ideas about gender roles, particularly that household chores are “women’s work.” Throughout the course of the novel, Justin finds his ideas challenged as he learns about how his beloved Grandpa cares for himself and his ranch in the tradition of the great Black cowboys.

HERITAGE AND IDENTITY:

Justin comes from a long line of Black cowboys and ranchers. Pacy comes from a Taiwanese American

immigrant family. Each character learns about their family and cultural heritage, developing a sense of self as they explore where they came from and who they are. As Grandpa tells Justin, “You must know where you’ve come from in order to find the way to where you want to go.”

REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA:

In *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World*, Justin says of Black cowboy Jesse Stahl, “Nobody ever heard about him. I didn’t.” His Grandpa replies, “Oh, there’s lots of famous Blacks you never hear or read about.” In *The Year of the Dog*, Pacy notices, “You never see a Chinese person in the movies or in a play or in a book.” She yearns for a book that reflects her own life and experiences. Justin experiences the joy of seeing Black cowboys—past and present—celebrated at a rodeo, while Pacy is inspired to write a “real Chinese Person book” to represent kids like her.

FINDING ONE’S TALENTS AND ONESELF:

In different ways, both Justin and Pacy yearn to be good at something, to find their talents and to make their families proud. And in different ways, both characters learn that understanding oneself and developing confidence in oneself and one’s abilities are crucial to excelling at something.

While these are the major themes of the novels, students may articulate them in various ways and identify various evidence from the text to support their ideas.

SUMMER EXTENSION: INDEPENDENT PROJECT WORK

Setting Your Vision for Project Work

While immersed in summer learning, students can engage in one or more of the optional projects outlined below, which will allow them to showcase their understanding of fiction as a genre and the elements of a compelling story. We recommend that you lead students through one of these projects on the final day of summer school as an opportunity to express their understanding of the key ideas in this unit and to celebrate the reading and thinking work they have done throughout the summer.

1 Flipped Perspective Scene

Students will develop their understanding of how a character's perspective influences how a story is told by retelling a scene from *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World* through the perspective of a character other than Justin. Students can choose a scene from the novel to carefully reread, interrogating Justin's perspective and considering how another character might see and interpret the events. Then, they can rewrite the scene using thoughts, dialogue, and action to convey the other character's perspective.

2 Metaphor-Rich Poem

The Year of the Dog is rich in figurative language, particularly metaphors and similes. Students can study Grace Lin's writing to understand why authors use figurative language and what effect metaphor has on readers. Then, they will apply their ideas to their own work, crafting a metaphor-rich poem about a theme or topic related to the book. After rereading and revising, students can publish their poems.

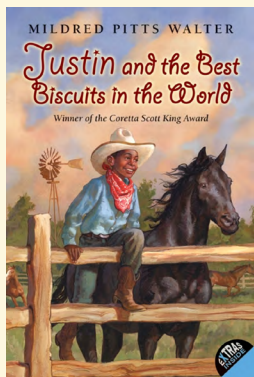


BOOK LISTS: GETTING TO KNOW YOUR LITERATURE



Great literature is central to the learning in this unit. Each lesson includes a Read Aloud, selected from the texts below. These texts not only build knowledge, but they also provide an authentic opportunity to model and reinforce essential reading habits taught in this unit.

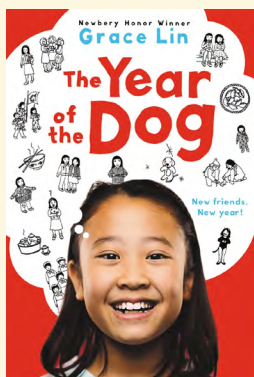
Anchor Texts



Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World

by Mildred Pitts Walter

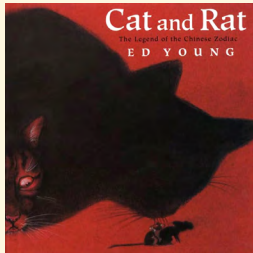
Ten-year-old Justin lacks confidence in his abilities, which leads him to reject housework as “women’s work.” As he spends time at his Grandpa’s ranch, his perspective on gendered work changes as he learns new skills and develops confidence with his Grandpa’s support. A significantly longer realistic fiction chapter book than the Unit 1 Read Alouds, *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World* provides students an opportunity to analyze character development throughout a longer novel.



The Year of the Dog

by Grace Lin

It is the Year of the Dog, a year for making friends and finding oneself, which seems particularly relevant to Taiwanese American Pacy. Students will relate to and empathize with Pacy as she explores her identity and tries to discover her talents. Like *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World*, this longer, but still accessible, novel provides an excellent bridge from second into third grade fiction reading.



Cat and Rat: The Legend of the Chinese Zodiac

by Ed Young

Students will extend the knowledge they've gained from *The Year of the Dog* by reading and discussing Ed Young's retelling of the legend of the Chinese zodiac (often known as "The Great Race"). Young's version explains how each animal came to represent a year in the lunar calendar and why cats and rats are enemies.

ADDITIONAL TEXTS:

In addition to the Read Aloud titles provided above, you will read two articles listed below. Links to each text are provided below and within each lesson where the text is used. You can access the Newsela article by following [these steps](#) to create a free teacher account.

You can also use your account to print a paper copy of each text directly from Newsela.

- "[Dom Flemons Presents a New Image of the American Cowboy](#)" by Ryan Heinsius, published by National Public Radio
- "[Lunar New Year Comes with Pain, Resiliency](#)" by Taylor Jung, Newsela staff



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Timing Guidance

Each lesson is designed for a 45-minute reading block. Following is a suggested pacing sequence for each part of the lesson. Teachers should modify this based on the particular lesson and the needs of their students

Reading Lesson

5 minutes	Set-Up and Launch
15-20 minutes	Read Aloud or Close Read
10 minutes	Quick Write
5-10 minutes	Whole-Class Discussion



Read Aloud Discussion

As part of each Read Aloud Lesson, students will engage in both partner discussion and a whole-class discussion about the Read Aloud text. As students engage in turn and talks with their partners, listen in to their conversations and strategically select 1-2 partnerships to share their thinking with the class. This is an effective way to productively move the conversation forward and to develop strong ideas as a class.

After you complete Read Aloud for that day, you may wish to have students turn and talk about the final discussion question with a partner before moving into a discussion circle. Once students are seated in a circle, they will use the ideas they developed with their partners to discuss the book with the entire class. You can prompt students with the Back-Pocket Questions provided in each lesson to ensure that the conversation supports students in understanding the big ideas in the book. It is important to give students as much ownership as possible over the whole-class discussion. You will know you've been successful when you can leave the circle and students are able to carry on a robust evidence-based discussion without you! Below are some teacher moves and discussion prompts that will help you toward this goal:

Encourage students to:

- Look at one another when speaking rather than at the teacher
- Speak audibly so the entire class can hear their ideas
- Listen carefully and evaluate one another's ideas
- Support their ideas with precise evidence from the text
- Ask one another questions to help clarify or push the thinking

Possible prompts include:

- Can you say more about that?
- What is your evidence?
- I agree/disagree because...
- Let's go back to this page/part of the book...
- Why is that important?
- What is the important idea here?



DAILY LESSON PLAN 1

Read Aloud

Materials: *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World*; Reader's Notebooks



Launch

Friends, I am so excited to begin our summer novel study! We'll study two of my favorite novels, Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World by Mildred Pitts Walter and The Year of the Dog by Grace Lin.

Take a moment to think back to some of the books you read on your own last summer. Now picture some of the books you've read recently. They're longer than the books you read last summer, aren't they? As you get older and become stronger readers, you'll read longer and longer books. And as you begin reading longer books, it's important that you hold on to the plot and trace character development throughout the entire book. In longer books, characters have a lot more room to change and grow! This summer, we'll study character development over the course of two longer chapter books—which will in turn help you read longer chapter books independently.

The best part, in my opinion, is that we get to spend a lot more time with the characters, to really get to know and understand them.

We'll start with Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World.



Read Aloud and Discuss

Read pages 1-13 of *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World* by Mildred Pitts Walter.

First, preview the book by showing students the front cover, epigraph, author bio, and table of contents.

Readers, what do you notice? What genre is this book, and what do you anticipate it will be about? Turn and talk with your partner.

Listen in as students discuss, then select 1-2 students to share their ideas. It is possible that some students (particularly students who live in urban areas and/or in the Northeast) will say that *Justin and the Best*

DAILY LESSON PLAN 1

Read Aloud (cont.)

Biscuits in the World is historical fiction. If so, show them the title of Chapter 1 and the illustration facing page 1 and support them in reevaluating their prediction.

Read to page 3, “Somebody to help him control Evelyn, his older sister.”

Hmm... so Justin has been lingering at the playground to avoid going home. It sounds like he has some kind of conflict with his older sister, Evelyn. I wonder what the issue is. Is she bossy? Is she mean to him?

Read to page 5, “He waited for her to say something about his being late.”

What have we learned so far about Justin’s relationship with his family? What is his perspective on each of his family members? Turn and talk.

Listen in as students discuss, then select 1-2 students to share their ideas, such as:

- Justin feels left out of his family, likely because he is the youngest and the only boy. He feels like an outsider hearing his mother and two older sisters chatting happily, especially when they stop talking as soon as he walks in.
- Justin has a rocky relationship with his older sister, Evelyn, who is five years older than him. From his perspective, she is bossy, and he hates that she’s in charge of him when his mom is at work.
- He has a better relationship with Hadiya, who is two years older than him. He appreciates that she defends him.
- Justin respects his mama and wants to please her. From his perspective, she is fair. When Evelyn is criticizing him, Justin is “glad his mother had rescued him as she always did.” He is angry with himself for getting home too late to help her with the groceries.

Read to page 6, “Now he could make up for being late.”

Why does Justin smile shyly when his mother tells Hadiya that Justin will do the dishes? Shouldn’t he be upset that he has to do them?

DAILY LESSON PLAN 1

Read Aloud (cont.)

Call on a student to explain that Justin is grateful to his mother for giving him an opportunity to redeem himself, to “make up for” failing to help her carry the groceries in, one of his main chores. This is an example of his mama being fair.

Read to the end of page 7.

Why does Justin think, “Wish I could go live with Grandpa”? Turn and talk.

Listen in as students discuss, then call on 1-2 students to share that Grandpa is Justin’s “favorite person.” Since Justin is frustrated with his family right now, he idealizes living with his grandpa.

Read to page 9, “Her room reeked with order.”

Hmm... it sounds like Justin admires Hadiya’s neat and orderly room. If he likes reading in her room so much, I wonder why he doesn’t clean his own room.

Read to the top of page 13, “He and Anthony went to the backyard.”



Whole-Class Discussion

Final Question: What have we learned about Justin’s perspective on household chores? What impact does Anthony have on Justin’s perspective?

Give students about a minute to discuss their initial ideas with a partner or small group. Then, give students time to engage in a quick write about this question in their Reader’s Notebooks.

As students complete their quick write, study their writing in real time and choose 1-2 students to kick off the discussion.

KEY IDEAS

- Justin finds household chores challenging. He struggles to do the dishes and clean his room. Justin thinks that carrying the groceries in from the car is the only job he does “well enough around the house to win praise and approval.”

DAILY LESSON PLAN 1

Read Aloud (cont.)

- Justin believes some gender stereotypes. From his perspective, household chores are “women’s work,” and he shouldn’t have to do them. He perceives cleaning as a waste of time.
- Justin’s friend Anthony encourages Justin’s sexist ideas. He first calls chores “women’s work” and seems resentful of his mom and grandma, who “get on” him to do what he calls “their work.”

BACK-POCKET QUESTIONS

- Think back to the beginning of the chapter. Why does Justin start running home when he sees his mother’s car in the driveway? How does he feel at that moment and why?
- What does Anthony mean by “women’s work”?
- What impact does Anthony have on Justin’s perspective?

DAILY LESSON PLAN 2

Read Aloud

Materials: *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World*; Reader's Notebooks



Launch

When we left off, Justin had given up cleaning his room before he'd even started. He and Anthony go to shoot hoops in the backyard, and when Evelyn tells him, "You had better get busy cleaning your room," he replies, "Aw, c'mon, Evelyn! I got all day to clean."

What do you think of this decision? Turn and talk with your partner.

Listen in as students discuss, then select 2-3 students to share. Look for students who have different perspectives. Perhaps one student relates to Justin's procrastination and empathizes with him, while another thinks he should buckle down and get the job done.

Let's see if our opinions change as we continue reading this chapter.



Read Aloud and Discuss

Read pages 13-27 of *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World* by Mildred Pitts Walter.

Read to the end of page 17.

What is Justin's problem? Turn and talk.

Listen in as students discuss, then call on 1-2 students to share that Justin's immediate problem is that he doesn't have time to clean his room before his grandpa arrives, as his mother instructed. He doesn't seem to know how to go about cleaning his room, which frustrates and discourages him. His overarching problem is that he lacks the skill and the will to do household chores, including washing the dishes and cleaning his room, possibly because he perceives cleaning as "women's work."

DAILY LESSON PLAN 2

Read Aloud (cont.)

BACK-POCKET QUESTION:

If students give a surface-level answer, such as “Justin’s problem is that he has to clean his room,” encourage them to think more deeply. What is the root of Justin’s problem? Why is he facing this predicament?

Read to the end of page 18.

How does Justin feel at the end of the chapter? Do you empathize with him? Why or why not? Turn and talk.

Listen in to partnerships as students discuss, then select 1-2 students to share their ideas, such as:

- Justin feels tired and frustrated. He’s upset that his room is still a mess and disappointed in himself for not being able to do a good job.
- Justin can’t understand why cleaning his room is so hard. He wonders if Anthony is right, that maybe “only women and girls can do” this type of work.
- Justin is a sympathetic character because he wants to do his best; he just doesn’t know how. It’s not his fault that he’s the youngest in his family. He needs his mother or his sisters to teach him how to clean. I feel bad for him because he does try to clean his room, and he is so frustrated when he can’t get it right.
- I don’t empathize with Justin because he wastes time playing basketball with Anthony when he knows he’s supposed to be cleaning. It’s his own fault that he runs out of time. He thinks cleaning is for girls, so he doesn’t try hard to clean his room or bother learning how to clean well.

Read to page 21, “Can’t do a thing right.”

Hmm... how does this scene further develop our understanding of Justin’s problem? Which of our ideas have been reinforced? What new ideas do you have? Turn and talk with your partner.

DAILY LESSON PLAN 2

Read Aloud (cont.)

Listen in to partnerships as students discuss, then select 1-2 students to share their ideas, such as:

- We know that Justin has trouble with household tasks. This scene reinforces that. He makes a big mess when he tries to cook a simple lunch.
- It doesn't seem fair that Evelyn criticizes Justin so harshly. It's not his fault that he doesn't know how to cook. Hadiya abandons him in the kitchen when he tries to tell her he doesn't know how. Also, to his credit, Justin does attempt to clean up the egg, but Evelyn kicks him out of the kitchen.
- It seems like Justin's problem is compounded by miscommunication. Instead of asking Hadiya to make him an egg, he could ask her to show him how. That might make her more sympathetic to him, and then he would learn. Instead, he just expects her to do it.

Read to page 24, "Grandpa stood waiting."

How does Justin feel? Why? Turn and talk.

Listen in as students discuss, then call on 1-2 students to share that Justin is ashamed. He's embarrassed that Grandpa saw his messy room and even more embarrassed that he shouted at his sisters in front of Grandpa. His feelings are compounded because of his love and respect for Grandpa.

Read to the end of page 27.



Whole-Class Discussion

Final Question: What kind of person is Grandpa? What effect does he have on Justin?

Give students about a minute to discuss their initial ideas with a partner or small group. Then, give students time to engage in a quick write about this question in their Reader's Notebooks.

DAILY LESSON PLAN 1

Read Aloud (cont.)

As students complete their quick write, study their writing in real time and choose 1-2 students to kick off the discussion.

KEY IDEAS

- Grandpa is gentle and patient. When everyone is arguing in Justin’s room, he defuses the situation by calmly asking to speak with Justin alone. Then, he quietly waits for Justin to share his feelings. He has a calming influence on Justin.
- Grandpa has a good sense of humor. He helps Justin feel better by laughing about his predicament.
- Grandpa is fair and diplomatic. He convinces his daughter, Justin’s mother, to let Justin visit him by making a “deal.” And he assures Hadiya that her turn to visit is next.

BACK-POCKET QUESTIONS

- Think about the scene in Justin’s room. How does Grandpa react? What does his reaction tell us about him?
- What does Justin like about Grandpa?



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