BODY BIOGRAPHY

Approximate Time Needed: 90 minutes

Lesson Objectives:
Students will work in small groups to produce a life-size visual representation of a character from literature. They will then present this representation to the class and evaluate the work of other groups.

Materials Needed:
1. Rolls of newsprint or bulletin board paper
2. Markers

Description:

- After students have read a work of literature or a biography, divide them into small groups and give each group a six-foot length of newsprint or bulletin board paper and a set of magic markers.
- Assign each group a character from the literary work or have the group choose a character.
- Students trace an outline of one group member’s body on the paper.
- Each group then chooses the best way to represent the following aspects of the character symbolically:
  - The Heart: Where should it be placed to best represent what this character loves most? What should it look like and what shape, color, pictures, or symbols should be included in it? If the character’s love changes, students should find a way to represent this visually.
  - The Backbone: This should be represented in a way that visually conveys what motivates the character most. For example, a backbone for the patriot Sam Adams could be the word freedom and drawings depicting the overthrow of British rule over the colonists.
  - The Hands: What does the character hold in her or his hands? Items that are associated with the character either literally or figuratively should be included. For example: Thomas Jefferson could have a copy of the Declaration of Independence in his hand. Something figurative could be the Liberty Bell or the scales of justice.
  - The Feet: On what is the character standing? This should a symbolic representation of the character’s most fundamental beliefs about life. For example: George Washington could have the surrendered sword of British general Cornwallis. Figurative items could be diagrams representing persistence, loyalty, honesty, or any other trait of Washington’s.
  - The Background: Students should draw some elements that suggest the character’s environment, background, or predicament.
  - Quotations: Near the character’s head, students should place two or three direct quotations from the story that sum up the character and add to an understanding of the character.
- When the groups have finished, they display their Body Biography and present it to the class. Their presentations should explain the choices they made and help the class understand the meaning of the symbols they have created.
• The rest of the class responds to the biography and presentation by making suggestions and discussing alternative ways in which the character might have been represented.

Assessment:
The rubric can be used if the teacher wants to assess the activity. Students should use the rubric to guide their work. A 100% score is based on the +4 column. This allows students the opportunity to earn bonus points when exceeding the +4 column in quality or quantity. A one percent bonus can be given for each +5 score (or any other score at the teacher’s discretion).

Additional Notes:
Students usually take to this activity with enthusiasm and energy; some visual learners lead their groups to make astounding visual interpretations. Sometimes, all the groups can represent the same character and then compare their representations. Alternatively, students could read different novels, illustrate the protagonist of each and then share with the class. Students at all levels can participate actively and fruitfully in this activity, and the finished products are often both attractive and intriguing.

Body Biography Suggestion:

1. **Placement** - Carefully choose the placement of your text and artwork. For example, the area where your character’s heart would be might be appropriate for illustrating the important relationships within his/her life. The hands might refer to actions or accomplishments of the character.
2. **Spine** - Actors often discuss a character's "spine." This is his/her objective within the work. What is the most important goal for your character? What drives his/her thought and actions? The answers to these questions are his/her "spine." How can you illustrate it?
3. **Virtues and Vices** - What are your character’s most admirable qualities? His/her worst? How can you make us visualize them?
4. **Color** - Colors are often symbolic. What color(s) do you most associate with your character? Why? How can you effectively weave these colors into your presentation?
5. **Symbols** - What objects can you associate with your character that illustrate his/her essence? Are their objectives mentioned within the work itself that you could use? If not, choose objects that especially seem to correspond with the character.
6. **Mirror, Mirror** - Consider both how your character appears to others on the surface and what you know about the character’s inner self. Do these images clash or correspond? What does this tell you about the character? How can you illustrate this mirror image?
7. **Changes** - How has your character changed within the work? Trace these changes within your artwork.