

## Character Diaries

If students are to succeed academically, we must engage them academically.

Brad had this in mind when he was teaching *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and used responses to a journal prompt to assess his students' involvement and engagement with the text. When the students walked in the room, he asked them to respond to the following question:

How are you enjoying reading *The Epic of Gilgamesh* so far? What is your favorite or least favorite part of the epic? One student replied, "I don't get the story . . . it's really confusing."

Upon reflection, Brad realized that he needed to find a way to further engage the students. As a result, he decided to have the students write character diaries. A character diary is a journal entry taken specifically from the point of view of one of the characters in the story. When writing a character diary, students' diary entries should reflect the unique qualities of the character, including rank or social position, sex, temperament, and personality. Character diaries allow students to express their understanding of the text in their own words through the point of view of one character. Here is an example from a student's journal:



### Example: Gilgamesh's Diary

Day One of Quest

My city, Uruk, my people . . . oh, they love me so . . . why shouldn't they? I am wise, look fantastic, and know so much. What I don't get is why Aruru sent down

this character, Enkidu. I mean, seriously, he's a beast!

Even though he is, I pinned him in four minutes . . . no one can beat me!

See the rubric in Exhibit 5.11 for a tool to evaluate character diaries. Following is an example of a character diary assignment for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

## Exhibit 5.11 Rubric for Character Diary Lesson

✓+	Exceeds standards	Student: Creates more than five diary entries Has more than one direct quote per entry Demonstrates an attempt to write in the style of the author/characters Demonstrates an understanding of the play/story Communicates the personality, temperament, sex, and social status of the character
✓	Meets standards	Student: Creates at least five diary entries Has at least one direct quote from the text per entry Demonstrates an understanding of the play/story Communicates the personality, temperament, sex, and social status of the character
✓-	Does not meet standards	Student: Has not created at least five diary entries Does not have at least one direct quote from the text per entry Has not demonstrated an understanding of the play/story Has not communicated the personality, temperament, sex, and social status of the character



### Example: *Romeo and Juliet* Character Diaries

For this major assignment (100 points), you will assume the persona of a character in *Romeo and Juliet* and create an appropriate diary. The diary entry will reflect the character's unique traits: sex, rank, and social position, as well as personality and temperament. Remember, you are climbing inside this character's skin; you *are* this character. How does the character think? Feel? Believe? Why does the character do what he or she

does? This activity stretches over the entire study of the play. I will give you time during classes to work on it.

Your diary will contain a minimum of five entries. Entries should show how the character grows and changes, based on what that character knows at certain points in the play. Include as much information from Shakespeare's text as possible in your journal entries. Quote the text directly at least once in each

entry. In fact, beginning with a quote may be a good jumping-off point for a creative exploration of the scene you plan to discuss in your entry.

Be creative. Tackle Shakespearean-sounding English or poetry for extra points (but only if you tackle it correctly and make sense!). If your character dies or disappears during the play, you must create a letter from another character who has "found" the diary and written

an explanation of what happened to the character (and if Shakespeare didn't say, that means you get to be creative).

Divide into small groups with other writers. Edit each other's work. Revise your entries. Your final drafts must be free of errors and presented in a creative format (think back to the *Oliver Twist* newspapers, which many of you did so creatively. How can you make a character diary look as nice?)

Writing as response to reading literature is a powerful tool. Through writing students are encouraged to consider the texts that they read in a reflective stance. New discoveries about character, plot, and theme can be made through writing activities. Vocabulary is also taught through all stages of the reading process: before, during, and after reading. Chapter Six presents teaching activities that address vocabulary issues when teaching the classics in an inclusive classroom. In this setting it is even more critical to appeal to different learning styles and provide creative and eclectic teaching and learning activities.