

# The Character Creator's Workshop: Building a Story from Objects

**Subject:** English Language Arts

**Grade Level:** Ages 10-12 (5th-6th Grade)

**Time Allotment:** 60 minutes

## Materials Needed:

- A "Mystery Bag" (any non-see-through bag like a tote bag, pillowcase, or paper bag)
  - 5-7 interesting, small objects from around the house placed inside the Mystery Bag. Ideas include:
    - An old key
    - A ticket stub (movie, concert, train)
    - A single, unmatched sock
    - A smooth, unusually colored stone
    - A small, broken toy
    - A recipe card with faded handwriting
    - A foreign coin
  - Notebook or paper
  - Pen or pencil
  - (Optional) Colored pencils or markers
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## Lesson Plan

### I. Learning Objectives (What we'll accomplish today!)

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. Analyze random objects to brainstorm creative character traits and a backstory.
2. Create a detailed character profile based on inferences from those objects.
3. Write a compelling story opening (1-2 paragraphs) that introduces the character to the reader using the "Show, Don't Tell" technique.

**Curriculum Alignment:** This lesson aligns with Common Core standards for narrative writing (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3 & W.6.3), which focus on developing real or imagined experiences using effective techniques and descriptive details.

### II. Warm-Up: The Five Senses Word Association (5 minutes)

Let's get our creative brains warmed up!

1. Grab a piece of paper and a pencil.
  2. I'm going to give you a word. I want you to quickly write down one thing for each of the five senses that you associate with that word. Don't think too hard!
  3. **The word is: "Library."**
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4. Write down:

- **See:** What do you see? (e.g., tall shelves, dusty books)
- **Hear:** What do you hear? (e.g., hushed whispers, turning pages)
- **Smell:** What do you smell? (e.g., old paper, bookbinding glue)
- **Touch:** What do you feel? (e.g., smooth wooden table, crinkly plastic cover)
- **Taste:** This can be imaginative! (e.g., taste of old coffee, a forgotten peppermint)

**Teacher's Note:** This activity primes the student to think in terms of sensory details, which will be crucial for the main activity.

### III. Mini-Lesson: "Show, Don't Tell" with Objects (10 minutes)

Great writers don't just tell us about their characters; they *show* us who they are through their actions, words, and possessions. An object can tell a whole story!

Let's practice. Instead of saying "The man was a messy eater," we could say:

*"The man's tie was a roadmap of his lunch, marked with a splatter of ketchup and a faint, greasy stain from his burger."*

See how the stained tie *shows* us he's messy? The object does the work.

**Let's try one together.** How could we use an object to show that a character is a world traveler?

- **Telling:** "She was a world traveler." (Boring!)
- **Showing:** "Her passport was thick and soft from use, its pages a chaotic collage of visa stamps from countries she could barely remember visiting." (Much more interesting!)

Today, you'll become a detective. You will use the objects in the Mystery Bag to discover and *show* us a brand new character.

### IV. Main Activity: The Mystery Bag Character Profile (30 minutes)

It's time to meet your character! You will pull the objects from the bag one by one to figure out who this person is.

#### Part 1: The Discovery (10 minutes)

1. Reach into the Mystery Bag (no peeking!) and pull out one object.
2. Examine it closely. In your notebook, answer these questions about the object:
  - What is it?
  - What does it feel/smell/look like?
  - Who would own something like this?
  - Does it have a story? Is it new or old? Broken or pristine?
3. Repeat this process for all the objects in the bag. Don't worry about connecting them yet—just get to know each item.

#### Part 2: The Character Profile (10 minutes)

Now, let's connect the dots. All of these items belong to ONE person. Based on your detective work, fill out this profile in your notebook.

- **Name:** (Give them a name that feels right)

- **Age:** (Roughly)
- **Three Personality Traits:** (e.g., forgetful, adventurous, secretive, sentimental) - Pick traits that the objects suggest.
- **What is their biggest secret or wish?** (Let the objects inspire you. Does the key unlock a secret box? Was the ticket stub from a day that changed their life?)
- **Connect the Objects:** For at least two objects, write one sentence explaining how your character got them. (e.g., "She found the smooth stone on a beach the day her family moved away.")
- **(Optional) Quick Sketch:** Draw what you think your character looks like.

### Part 3: The Story Opening (10 minutes)

Now it's time to introduce your character to the world! Write the first paragraph or two of a story about them. Your goal is to *show* us who they are without telling us directly.

#### Your mission, should you choose to accept it:

- Start your story in a specific place (a dusty attic, a busy train station, a quiet kitchen).
- Introduce your character by having them interact with **at least one** of the objects from the bag.
- Use at least **three sensory details** from your warm-up (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste).

### V. Share and Reflect (15 minutes)

This is the best part! Let's talk about the amazing character you created.

1. Read your story opening aloud. It's always great to hear your writing.
2. Let's discuss:
  - Which object was the most helpful for creating your character? Why?
  - What was the most surprising connection you made between the objects?
  - If you were to continue this story, what do you think would happen next?
  - What part of the "Show, Don't Tell" rule was the easiest for you? What was the hardest?

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### Differentiation and Extension

- **For Support:** If brainstorming is difficult, work together on the first two objects. Ask leading questions like, "This key looks very old. Do you think it belongs to an old person, or someone who likes old things? What kind of door do you think it opens?"
- **For an Extra Challenge:**
  1. Write a short dialogue scene where your new character tries to explain the meaning of one of the objects to another person.
  2. Create a "nemesis" or a "best friend" for your character. What objects would be in *their* mystery bag?
  3. Continue your story opening, writing a full page.