

Understanding Characters Through Their Actions

What does she do about it, and what does that tell you?

5 days · 5 books · 165 min lessons + 35 min final task · 87 min short lessons · Grade 1

The idea

A character is not only what a book says about them; it is also what they do in response to what happens. Five Grade 1 books make those responses visible in words, actions, and pictures.

The unit begins with responses that are easy to see, then makes the evidence smaller and the change more important. By the end, students are tracking a response across a whole story and supporting a character claim from what actually happened on the page.

The arc

- Read a character from what they do when something happens.
- Recognize a repeated response as a choice.
- Use words and actions across beginning, middle, and end to explain a change in attitude.
- Notice a response that changes at one clear verbal moment.
- Track a response that changes gradually under evidence.

Where this fits in your year

Use this after students can recount important events but before later work asks for more independent character inference.

Days 1–2 establish visible responses. Day 3 uses The Dot to build one coherent attitude-change arc from three actions/phrases. Days 4–5 make change itself the focus, first at one moment and then across a whole story.

The 5 days

DAY 1 · What Stephanie Says Back

Compare how Stephanie answers an insult with how she answers being copied.

Why here. Her response repeats plainly and then changes once, so the class can see both stability and a turn on the opening day.

From Stephanie's Ponytail by Robert Munsch · 33 min full · 17 min short.

DAY 2 · How Elizabeth Answers

Describe how Elizabeth responds to a threat and to an insult, and what her answers have in common.

Why here. Her response is defined partly by what she refuses to accept; students have to use action and words rather than equating strength with fighting back.

From The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch · 33 min full · 17 min short.

DAY 3 · What Vashti Does About It

Compare Vashti's actions and words near the beginning, middle, and end to explain how her attitude toward drawing changes.

Why here. The class now has to connect three moments into one attitude-change arc: the forceful first mark, her response to the framed dot, and the way she helps the boy begin.

From The Dot by Peter H. Reynolds · 30 min full · 15 min short · Makes: Three moments and one change statement.

DAY 4 · How They Answer Her

Describe how the girl responds to being left, and how she changes her mind about Sarah.

Why here. One swapped word changes the whole answer, so students study change at the smallest possible scale.

From Don't Forget to Come Back by Robie H. Harris · 34 min full · 18 min short.

DAY 5 · Smarter Than You Think

Track what Megan says about pigs from the beginning to the end, and work out what she has and has not learnt.

Why here. The final response changes in stages under evidence rather than at a single moment, requiring the class to track the whole arc.

From Pigs by Robert Munsch · 35 min full · 20 min short.

Checkpoints

After Day 2 · What she did, and what it tells you. Use the familiar final Ronald-and-Elizabeth spread. The child names Elizabeth's response and then supports a character claim from it.

After Day 5 · Where it changed. Give four paraphrased Stephanie response moments in order. The child marks where the repeated response becomes a deliberate trap and explains the change.

The task at the end

Two columns. Each child chooses one of the five characters and records what happened / what the character faced beside what the character did or said in response. The child then writes or dictates one character claim that can be proved from the response column.

Collect. The two columns and the one evidence-based sentence. Time. About 35 minutes.

Teacher key

The claim must be supportable from the response column alone. For The Dot, keep all three moments serving one target:

Vashti's attitude changes from resistance/frustration toward engagement and confidence that drawing can begin with a small mark. Do not split that day into unrelated mood-label tasks.

What a strong answer looks like

- Action — says what the character did before naming what it shows.
- Claim — makes a statement about the character.
- Evidence — supports the claim from words, actions, or pictures.
- Change — identifies how or where a response altered.

Keeping the daily evidence

Keep each child's response evidence from Day 1 and Day 5. The unit is working if the evidence becomes more specific and students increasingly distinguish what happened from what the character did about it.