



## Writing Fiction: Using Older Characters Lesson Plan

### Introduction

Fictional readings and writing assignments are more likely to be about young characters than older ones. Older people bring new and different perspectives to stories. Teachers should encourage young writers to develop creative older adult characters and to avoid simple stereotypical characters.

### Objectives

Students will:

- consider the role age plays in story lines; and
- develop creative older adult characters in short stories.

### Procedures

1. Explain to students that the main objective of this writing exercise is to develop a creative, non-stereotypical older fictional character. Introduce the assignment with a short discussion of the following points: Good writers do not rely on stereotypical characters. Two common stereotypes of older people are the sweet, old grandparent type and the frail, miserly, crotchety type. Students may recall older characters in literature that reflect different portrayals of older people, e.g., grandfather in Heidi, Ole King Cole, The Old Man and the Sea, Scrooge in A Christmas Carol.
2. Assign the writing exercise. First, have students develop an older fictitious character for a short story which might be titled, "A Day in the Life of \_\_\_\_\_ (older person's name)." Students develop the personal and physical characteristics of the older person. The teacher might give students an example, such as the character Angela Lansbury plays in the television show Murder, She Wrote. After thinking about their lead characters, students outline a story plot around particular events and circumstances facing their older characters, then write their short stories. The stories may include characters of other ages, but an older person should be the lead character. Encourage students to think creatively by developing older characters who confront their situations in non-stereotypical ways.
3. In cooperative learning groups, students may compare stories in terms of attitudes toward aging and the aged, lifestyles and intergenerational relations of older people, and perceived options available to older people. Discuss the extent to which student writings reflect traditional stereotypes of older people. Consider the kinds and severity of problem situations in which students placed their older characters. Students may suggest to their group members plot and character development alternatives that might be less stereotypical.

### Extension Activity

Hold a class discussion on how the age of characters affects a story. Give examples of stories students have read recently. What would happen to the story if an older family member, friend or enemy were introduced? What would happen if the lead character were older? For example, what if the Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew were older or had an older accomplice working cases with them? Students might read a story, and then write another version of the same story by introducing an older character or making the lead character older.