Explain How a Character Changes

Classroom copy · 2 November 2026

In this estimated 40-minute lesson, learners use a short original story to explain how a character's choices change over time. They cite early and later words or actions, distinguish change in a person from a change in circumstances, and avoid claiming more than the story shows.

Track a character over time

To explain character change, compare the character's words or actions near the beginning with words or actions later. Cite a detail from each time and explain what the difference suggests about the character's thinking, choices, or actions. Separate the person from changing circumstances: a broken object, new place, or changed plan is not by itself evidence that the character changed. Name what the story does not establish, and do not turn one moment into a permanent trait.

Oren shares his route notes

Invented instructional example.

Before group work began, Oren kept his observation chart folded and waited for a partner to choose the next step. When the group's sketch missed a turn, Oren opened the chart and pointed to his notes. The next day, he placed the chart beside the map and asked, “Can we check each turn together?” He still paused before sharing, but he offered to record the route.

Modeled practice

Read “Oren shares his route notes.” Find one detail from near the beginning and one detail from later. What changes in Oren’s choices? Which event changes around him? Compare your reasoning with the model.

> At first Oren keeps his chart folded and waits for a partner to choose. Later he opens it, points to his notes, asks to check the turns together, and offers to record the route. His choices shift from waiting to contributing notes and asking to work together. The missed turn changes the group’s task, but that circumstance alone does not show Oren changed. He still pauses before sharing, so the story does not show that he is always confident.

The Next Test

Original fictional story.

On Monday, Anika carried her folded-card bridge into the makers' room inside a notebook. She had built it from two index cards and a strip of tape. At the first school test, the center sagged under seven washers. Anika pressed the bridge flat and wrote, “Add a center support before I show anyone.” When Mr. Cho invited students to bring designs to Friday's family night, Anika said, “I'll bring mine when it can hold twenty.” She kept the notebook closed while she added another strip of tape by herself.

On Wednesday, Anika set the bridge at the end of the makers' room table. Tomas, who was building beside her, asked, “Which part bends?” Anika started to close the notebook. “I'll test it later,” she said. Tomas offered to add washers one at a time while she watched. After a pause, Anika moved the notebook aside. “Could you tell me when the center starts to dip?”

At seven washers, the middle sagged again. Anika traced the crease with one finger. She and Tomas folded a spare index card into a support and slipped it under the bridge. Their next test held ten washers; at eleven, one end dipped. Anika wrote, “Center held to ten. Check the left end.” She asked Tomas to test from that side next. The bridge still needed work, but Anika did not put it away.

On Friday, Anika placed the bridge on the family-night test table with her notebook beside it. A fourth grader asked if he could try it. “Yes. Add one washer at a time, and watch the left end,” Anika said. When the eleventh washer made that end dip, she recorded the result instead of covering the bridge. “Now I know where to start,” she said. It still could not hold twenty washers. Anika left it on the table and invited the fourth grader to help her plan another test.

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Character change evidence tracker

Record words or actions from more than one point in “The Next Test.” Keep changes in Anika separate from changes in the bridge or setting. The tracker gives space but does not supply the answer.

Near the beginning: one action or statement by Anika

Later: one action or statement by Anika

What changes in the bridge or situation?

What changes in Anika’s choices or actions? Use both details.

One thing the story does not establish

Guided practice

With a partner, reread “The Next Test.” Use the tracker to note one early action or statement by Anika and one later action or statement. Then identify one change in the bridge or situation. Discuss which details show a change in Anika’s choices and which describe circumstances. Point to the words; do not write the final paragraph yet.

Partner evidence notes

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Independent response

Write a short paragraph explaining how Anika changes from the beginning to the end of “The Next Test.” Include (1) one early word or action, (2) at least one later word or action, (3) what changes in Anika’s choices and how this differs from a change in the bridge or setting, and (4) one thing the story does not establish. Use a quotation or precise paraphrase for each piece of evidence. Use the optional tracker if helpful.

Independent character-change response

Original MentorTeaching instructional wording for Explain How a Character Changes.

The Oren route-notes vignette is an original fictional instructional example.

“The Next Test” is an original fictional instructional story.

Teacher directions

Grade 6 ELA. Adapt the reading and response demands to your students and curriculum.

Prerequisites: Learners can read or listen to a short fictional story and point to a sentence or action. No prior lesson on character traits is required.

Materials: Learner pages in print or editable format.; Pencil; a highlighter or two colored pencils are optional for marking early and later evidence.; Board or display for the modeled evidence tracker; optional. No physical bridge or counters are needed.

Estimated preparation: 5 minutes. Basis: Estimate to read the story and key, prepare learner copies, and optionally set up the model tracker.

Estimated teaching: 40 minutes. Basis: Planning estimate: opening 3 minutes, strategy 5, model 7, guided practice 10, independent response 13, closure 2.

Before teaching (about 5 minutes, estimate): read the model and story with the key, prepare learner copies, and optionally draw tracker columns for early evidence, later evidence, changed circumstances, and what the story does not establish. No physical bridge or outside reading is needed.

Opening — 3 minutes (estimate): ask learners to distinguish “the bridge changed” from “Anika changed.” Explain that changes in an object, setting, or plan are circumstances; to explain character development, use the character’s words or actions at different points in the story.

Strategy — 5 minutes (estimate): introduce the learner sequence: (1) locate an early action or statement; (2) locate a later one; (3) describe the difference in the character’s thinking, choices, or actions; (4) separate that evidence from a change in the situation; and (5) state a limit. A single moment does not prove a permanent personality trait.

Model — 7 minutes (estimate): read “Oren shares his route notes.” Think aloud with one early clue (folded chart; waits for a partner) and later clues (opens notes, asks to check turns, volunteers to record). Explain that the missed turn changes the group’s circumstances; Oren’s choices provide the evidence of his change. Notice that he still pauses, so do not call him permanently confident.

Guided practice — 10 minutes (estimate): pairs reread “The Next Test” and fill early/later fields on the tracker. Ask them to circle one circumstance change, such as the bridge holding more washers or the move to family night. Then ask which exact Anika action shows a change in how she works. Accept different supported evidence.

Independent response — 13 minutes (estimate): learners write about Anika using one early and one later detail, explain the character change rather than only the bridge’s improvement, and name a limit. The tracker is optional. Score the four criteria separately; accept precise paraphrases and alternative explanations supported by the story.

Closure — 2 minutes (estimate): ask learners to complete, “The situation changes when ___. Anika changes when she ___.” Remind them that a story can show one change in one situation without proving a lasting trait across every setting.

Shortened 30-minute option (estimate): opening 2 minutes; strategy 4; model 5; guided practice 7; independent response 10; closure 2. Keep the early/later evidence comparison and the distinction between character and circumstance. Shorten the partner share-out, not the independent explanation.

Support: If tracking chronology is a barrier, read the story aloud or use text-to-speech, chunk it by paragraph, and mark “early” and “later” with two symbols. Offer the tracker’s sentence starters orally and

allow oral rehearsal or dictation when writing mechanics are not the target; record the response mode. Keep the comparison and evidence requirement. Confirm individual access needs locally; general suggestions do not replace an access plan.

Extension: write a short follow-up scene in a new activity where Anika receives feedback on another design. Include two observable words or actions that let a reader judge whether her approach transfers. Annotate what the scene supports and what one scene still cannot prove about her behavior in every setting.

Common confusions: a bridge that holds more washers is an object change, not by itself evidence of character development; moving to family night changes the setting, not automatically the character; asking for help once does not prove permanent confidence. Ask learners to compare exact actions or words from different moments and to avoid guessing private motives.

The model vignette and “The Next Test” are fictional classroom examples.

Model — intended evidence: Learner uses early and later actions to explain Oren’s shift from keeping notes folded and waiting to sharing notes and offering to record, while distinguishing the group’s missed turn from Oren’s change.

Guided practice — intended evidence: Learner identifies Anika initially hides the unfinished bridge and plans to show it only when it holds twenty, then asks Tomas and a younger student to test it and records results. Learner distinguishes bridge performance and the family-night setting from changes in Anika’s choices.

Independent response — intended evidence: Learner supports a defensible account of Anika’s change with early and later evidence, distinguishes character change from the bridge’s improved performance or the shift to family night, and limits any claim about lasting confidence or future behavior.

Answer keys

— key for Model

Near the beginning, Oren keeps his observation chart folded and waits for a partner to choose. Later he opens the chart, points to his notes, asks to check each turn together, and offers to record the route. His choices move from waiting to contributing notes and inviting a shared check. The missed turn changes the group’s task; that event alone does not establish a change in Oren. He still pauses before sharing, so the story does not show that he is always confident.

The answer compares actions from early and later moments and explains the difference without treating the missed turn as character evidence. It limits the claim to the scene and accepts that Oren still hesitates.

Oren first waits for a partner and keeps his chart closed. Later he shares his notes, asks to check the map together, and volunteers to record. The route problem is a circumstance; his response shows he contributes more. We do not know whether he will always share quickly.

Accept another accurate early/later pair and a defensible description such as more willing to contribute or collaborate. Do not require “confident”; the text says he still pauses.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

— key for Guided practice

Early, Anika hides the bridge in her notebook, writes that she should add support before showing anyone, and says she will bring it only when it holds twenty washers. Later, she moves the notebook aside, asks Tomas to identify when the center dips, records what the test shows, and invites a younger student to watch the left end. The bridge’s ability to hold more washers and the family-night setting are circumstance changes. Anika’s choice to show unfinished work, ask for a test, and use the result is evidence of a change in how she approaches the project.

The guided response uses evidence from different moments. A changed bridge and a new event are not character change by themselves; Anika’s observable choices show a shift in this project.

At first Anika wants to keep the bridge hidden until it holds twenty. Later she asks Tomas to test it and shares it with the fourth grader even though it still bends. The bridge improves, but her willingness to test it with someone is the character evidence.

Accept other accurate story details. A learner may describe the change as moving from waiting to share until perfect toward using feedback while the bridge is unfinished. Do not require a claim that Anika is permanently confident or always asks for help.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

— key for Independent response

At first, Anika keeps the bridge hidden in a notebook and says she will show it only when it can hold twenty washers. Later, she asks Tomas to watch when the center dips, writes down the test result, and invites a fourth grader to help test the unfinished bridge. This suggests that, during this project, she shifts from trying to make it work alone before sharing to using another person’s observations to choose her next step. The bridge holding ten washers and the move from the makers’ room to family night are

circumstance changes; her actions are the evidence of character change. The story does not establish that she will always ask for help or feel confident in other situations.

The response cites early and later evidence, connects the evidence to a limited change in choices, separates the object and setting from Anika, and avoids a permanent-trait claim. Learners may choose other accurate evidence and state another reasonable limit.

Anika first hides her bridge and waits until it works before showing it. By Friday, she lets a younger student test it and asks him to watch the left end. Her bridge has changed too, but inviting help with an unfinished project shows a shift in her choices. We cannot tell if she will do this in every activity.

Accept any evidence-based account of a shift in Anika’s choices or approach during this project, including a cautious claim such as becoming more willing to share test results. Do not require that she becomes fearless or that her bridge is finished. A response that mentions only the bridge’s strength or the new setting does not yet explain character change.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

Scoring criteria and extensions

Criterion 1 — scoring criterion

Identifies an accurate early action or statement from the story. Example: Anika hides the bridge in her notebook and says she will show it only when it holds twenty washers. Alternatives: Accept another accurate early detail. A description of the bridge alone does not identify Anika’s action or words.

Criterion 2 — scoring criterion

Identifies an accurate later action or statement that can be compared with the early evidence. Example: Anika asks Tomas to watch the bridge and later invites a fourth grader to test it. Alternatives: Accept any accurate later action or statement. Do not require the exact family-night detail.

Criterion 3 — scoring criterion

Explains a defensible change in the character’s choices or actions using early and later evidence, and distinguishes it from a change in circumstances. Example: Anika moves from hiding the unfinished bridge and trying alone toward showing it and using another person’s observations. Alternatives: Accept a precise, narrower interpretation such as more willing to test the bridge with someone. Do not score only “the bridge got stronger” as character change.

Criterion 4 — scoring criterion

Names a reasonable limit and avoids claiming a permanent trait or future behavior the story does not establish. Example: The story does not show whether Anika will ask for help in other activities. Alternatives: Accept another text-based limit. A learner may say the story cannot show what Anika always does from this one project.

Support (Independent response): If tracking chronology is a barrier, read the story aloud or use text-to-speech, chunk it by paragraph, and mark early and later evidence with two symbols. Offer the tracker sentence starters orally and allow rehearsal or dictation when mechanics are not the target; record response mode. Keep the character-versus-circumstance comparison. Confirm individual access needs locally; general suggestions do not replace an access plan.

Extension (Independent response): Invite learners to write a short follow-up scene in a new activity where Anika receives feedback on another design. Include two observable words or actions that let a reader judge whether her approach transfers. Annotate what the scene supports and what one scene still cannot prove about her behavior in every setting.

Original MentorTeaching instructional wording for Explain How a Character Changes.

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Fictional teaching response — sound for the named task

Named task: The Next Test — Anika’s changes in choices

Fictional response — sound for the named task: “Anika moves from hiding unfinished work toward sharing it and using other people’s observations. Early she keeps the notebook closed and says she will bring the bridge only when it holds twenty washers. Later she asks Tomas to watch the dipping center, then lets the fourth grader test and help plan another attempt even though the bridge still cannot hold twenty. Her choices about sharing/testing change, separately from the bridge’s increased capacity. The story does not establish that she will always welcome help in every setting.”

Visible evidence: Accurate early/later evidence, an explained choice change, distinction from circumstances and a limit.

Not established: A permanent personality change or independent transfer to an unseen story; this is familiar-text composition after teaching.

Clarify: Ask which actions show the change even while the bridge remains unfinished.

Next teaching/evidence: Use the character-change response pack’s different Fresh recheck story after selected response teaching; preserve that story until then.

This response is invented for teacher interpretation. Accept defensible alternatives. Record access, prior exposure and the actual response; do not assign an ability label or claim mastery from this example.

Different check after response teaching

Character Change: Check and Next Steps — matching teacher directions and answers

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Fictional teaching response — partially developed

Named task: The Next Test — Anika’s changes in choices

Fictional response — partially developed: “At first the bridge sagged under seven washers; later it held ten.”

Visible evidence: A relevant change in the bridge’s test performance.

Not established: How Anika’s choices change; a circumstance/result change is not itself a character explanation.

Clarify: Ask what Anika does differently with other people before and after, using exact actions.

Next teaching/evidence: Use the character-change response pack model and supported practice with its teacher script to compare early/later choices and distinguish the room/event change. Then use the different Fresh recheck.

This response is invented for teacher interpretation. Accept defensible alternatives. Record access, prior exposure and the actual response; do not assign an ability label or claim mastery from this example.

Model and supported practice

Reserve: Different check after response teaching

Character Change: Check and Next Steps — matching teacher directions and answers

Fictional teaching response — plausible error

Named task: The Next Test — Anika’s changes in choices

Fictional response — plausible error: “Anika becomes completely fearless because her bridge finally holds twenty washers.”

Visible evidence: A proposed character-change interpretation.

Not established: Accurate support: it still does not hold twenty, and completely fearless exceeds her observed actions.

Clarify: Re-read the final test result and identify actions showing willingness to share unfinished work without assigning a permanent trait.

Next teaching/evidence: Use the character-change response pack’s early/later evidence model and supported practice, limiting the interpretation to choices in the supplied story. Reserve the different recheck rather than repeating Anika as unseen reading.

This response is invented for teacher interpretation. Accept defensible alternatives. Record access, prior exposure and the actual response; do not assign an ability label or claim mastery from this example.

Model and supported practice

Reserve: Different check after response teaching

Character Change: Check and Next Steps — matching teacher directions and answers