Character Analysis—“Edna’s Ruthie”
From The House on Mango Street
Grade Eight

About this Lesson
This lesson uses one paragraph from the vignette “Edna’s Ruthie” to demonstrate to students how syntax helps to reveal character. After completing the questions in Activity One, the class should read the entire vignette and then complete the questions in Activity Two. The activities in this lesson can be used as a model for teaching character analysis using any text.

Passages for LTF® lessons are selected to challenge students, while lessons and activities make texts accessible. Guided practice with challenging texts allows students to gain the proficiency necessary to read independently at or above grade level.

This lesson is included in Module 6: Linking Characterization to Meaning.

Objectives
Students will
• demonstrate an understanding of appositives and appositive phrases.
• make inferences based on the writer’s use of syntax.
• provide appropriate evidence to support assertions.
• analyze the effect of figurative language on characterization.
• write thoughtful and effective commentary to support their analysis.

Level
Grade Eight

Connection to Common Core Standards for English Language Arts
LTF Foundation Lessons are designed to be used across grade levels and therefore are aligned to the CCSS Anchor Standards. Teachers should consult their own grade-level-specific Standards. The activities in this lesson allow teachers to address the following Common Core Standards:

Explicitly addressed in this lesson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Level of Thinking</th>
<th>Depth of Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RL.8.1</td>
<td>Cite the evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL.8.3</td>
<td>Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.</td>
<td>Analyze</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL.8.4</td>
<td>Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.</td>
<td>Analyze</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Teacher Overview—Character Analysis

#### “Edna’s Ruthie” From The House on Mango Street

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Learning Progression Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RL.8.6</td>
<td>Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.</td>
<td>Analyze III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL.8.10</td>
<td>By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.</td>
<td>Understand II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| L.8.5    | Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.  
   a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., verbal irony, puns) in context.  
   b. Use the relationship between particular words to better understand each of the words.  
   c. Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., *bullheaded, willful, firm, persistent, resolute*). | Understand I |
| L.8.6    | Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression. | Understand II |
| W.8.2    | Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.  
   a. Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information, into broader categories; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.  
   b. Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.  
   c. Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.  
   d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.  
   e. Establish and maintain a formal style.  
   f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented. | Create III |
## Teacher Overview—Character Analysis

### “Edna’s Ruthie” From The House on Mango Street

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Level of Thinking</th>
<th>Depth of Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W.8.4</td>
<td>Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)</td>
<td>Create</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| W.8.9 | Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.  
- Apply grade 8 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new”).  
- Apply grade 8 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced”). | Analyze | III |
| W.8.10 | Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. | Apply | III |

Implicitly addressed in this lesson:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Level of Thinking</th>
<th>Depth of Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L.4</td>
<td>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials as appropriate.</td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL.1</td>
<td>Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LTF Skill Focus
The foundation for LTF English lessons is the Skill Progression Chart that identifies key skills for each domain, beginning with grade 6 and adding more complex skills at each subsequent grade level while reinforcing skills introduced at previous grade levels. The Skill Focus for each individual lesson identifies the skills actually addressed in that lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures of Speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Figurative Language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Connections to AP*
Character analysis is a skill that is required of students in both the free response and multiple choice sections of AP English Literature exams. AP Literature students should be able to effectively link an author’s use of syntax and figurative language to characterization techniques.

*Advanced Placement and AP are registered trademarks of the College Entrance Examination Board. The College Board was not involved in the production of this material.

Materials and Resources
- copies of Student Activity
- copies of “Edna’s Ruthie”
Assessments
The following kinds of formative assessments are embedded in this lesson:
- guided questions
- fill-in-the-blank
- frame statements
- writing activities

Additional Assessments
- formative assessments on LTF website: grades 6-7

Teaching Suggestions
Due to the length of this lesson, teachers should divide the lesson into more than one class period. Multiple choice questions on “Edna’s Ruthie” may be found on the LTF website under Grade Level Assessments—7th Grade—Fiction.

Answers
Activity One
1. a. Ruthie; b. is; c. tall…forgot
2. a. takes, laughs
3. a. She doesn’t need anybody to laugh with, she just laughs b. If the independent clauses are joined using a semicolon; the second clause begins with a lowercase letter. Independent clauses may also be joined with a period and a capital letter.

Activity Two
4. a. simile, Ruthie’s whistling to the Emperor’s nightingale, b. simile, Ruthie to a wild animal c. metaphor (personification is a type of metaphor), compares Edna to a screen door

All other answers for this lesson are subjective and will vary. To obtain the maximum benefit of the lesson, ask students to go beyond the expected responses.
Character Analysis—“Edna’s Ruthie”
From The House on Mango Street
Grade Eight

Activity One
Read the first paragraph of “Edna’s Ruthie” from The House on Mango Street.

“Ruthie, tall skinny lady with red lipstick and blue babushka¹, one blue sock and one green because she forgot, is the only grown-up we know who likes to play. She takes her dog BoBo for a walk and laughs all by herself, that Ruthie. She doesn’t need anybody to laugh with, she just laughs.”

¹babushka: a triangularly folded scarf tied around the head

This first paragraph concisely and entertainingly characterizes Ruthie. Diction and imagery are two of Cisneros’s tools in this direct characterization, but syntax contributes as well.

Read each sentence below and complete the questions that follow.

1. “Ruthie, tall skinny lady with red lipstick and blue babushka, one blue sock and one green because she forgot, is the only grown-up we know who likes to play.”

   a. Underline the subject of the sentence.

   b. Underline the verb twice.

   c. What comes between the subject and the verb? Highlight it.

The words “tall skinny lady with red lipstick and blue babushka, one blue sock and one green because she forgot” constitute an appositive phrase, providing identifying information about the noun (“Ruthie”) that precedes it.

Appositive phrase—renames or identifies a noun or pronoun

What does this appositive accomplish? It characterizes Ruthie, directly informing the reader that she is tall and skinny. But it also characterizes her in other ways that are less explicit.
d. What do the following words from the appositive **imply** about Ruthie?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Inference</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“red lipstick”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“blue babushka”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“one blue sock and one green”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“because she forgot”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

e. Rewrite this first sentence, including all of the information but without using an appositive. Note: You will probably have to write more than one sentence.


f. Included in the appositive phrase above is the dependent clause “because she forgot.” What information would be lost if the author left out this clause?


We might say that, through the use of a long appositive, Cisneros piles on descriptive details about Ruthie. They are not as essential as the “bare bones” of the sentence (“Ruthie is the only grown-up we know who likes to play”), but they reinforce the information in those “bare bones.”

2. **“She takes her dog BoBo for a walk and laughs all by herself, that Ruthie.”**

a. This sentence contains an independent clause ("She takes her dog BoBo for a walk and laughs all by herself") containing the subject “She” and a compound verb:

               

b. Saying that Ruthie laughs provides some characterization, but her character is made much more complete with the addition of the prepositional phrase “all by herself.”
By adding the phrase “all by herself,” Cisneros informs the reader that Ruthie is the kind of person who ____________________________

______________________________________________________________

c. There is a two-word addition to the independent clause in sentence two: “that Ruthie.” This appositive would not generally be used in formal writing, but might be heard in conversation among friends.

Read the complete sentence aloud. What facial expression and/or movement of the head occurs when you say “that Ruthie” at the end of the sentence?

______________________________________________________________

What attitude toward Ruthie do these words help to reveal? (Circle all the tone words that apply.)

affectionate  somber  amused  annoyed  confused  disgusted  friendly  resentful

d. Complete the sentences of commentary below:

Through the use of conversational, informal language, Cisneros establishes a/an ____________________________ feeling toward Ruthie. The narrator ____________________________ Ruthie, a woman who ____________________________

(Answer one of these questions: How does Ruthie feel or act? What does she care or not care about?)

3. “She doesn’t need anybody to laugh with, she just laughs.”

a. This sentence contains two independent clauses. Highlight each of the two clauses in a different color.

b. What is the rule about joining two independent clauses if you do not use a conjunction?

What kind of punctuation should you use? ____________________________

Why might Cisneros have chosen not to follow the usual rule? ____________________________
Activity Two
Read the rest of “Edna’s Ruthie” before answering the questions below.

1. Read the assertion below. Quote five pieces of evidence from the vignette that support the assertion. Be sure to include paragraph numbers.

   **Assertion:** Ruthie is childlike.

   **Evidence:**
   
   Evidence: ____________________________________________
   
   Evidence: ____________________________________________
   
   Evidence: ____________________________________________
   
   Evidence: ____________________________________________
   
   Evidence: ____________________________________________

2. Ruthie alludes to Marlon Brando and a sphinx. What do the allusions suggest about Ruthie?

3. Read the following pieces of evidence about Edna. Write an assertion that is supported by the evidence given.

   **Evidence:** “Every week Edna is screaming at somebody” (paragraph 2).
   
   **Evidence:** “Once she threw out a pregnant lady just because she owned a duck” (paragraph 2).
   
   **Evidence:** “I don’t care. Go if you want to” (paragraph 7).

   **Assertion:** ____________________________________________

4. Identify the following comparisons as either similes or metaphors. Then fill in the blanks to identify the things being compared and explain the effect of the comparison.

   a. ________________“Then we heard someone whistling—beautiful like the Emperor’s nightingale—and when we turned around there was Ruthie.”

      Comparing Ruthie’s __________________________ to the sound of __________________________

      makes Ruthie seem __________________________ because __________________________.
b. “She never comes in the stores and if she does she keeps looking around her like a wild animal in a house for the first time.”

Comparing the way Ruthie acts when she _______________ to _______________ makes Ruthie seem _______________ because _______________.

C. “I don’t care says the screen.”

Comparing Edna to a _______________ seems to suggest she is _______________ _______________ because _______________.

5. A young girl named Esperanza narrates this vignette. In paragraph eight Esperanza wonders why Ruthie is living on Mango Street “if she doesn’t have to.” Read this paragraph again. Because of her youth and innocence, Esperanza may not realize the truth about Ruthie that the details in this paragraph suggest. What should the reader infer about Ruthie from these details?

6. Suggest two possible reasons for the contradiction in Ruthie’s character. They must be believable based on details from the vignette.

7. After carefully examining the first paragraph of “Edna’s Ruthie,” the reader has a limited understanding of Ruthie’s character. Did your view of Ruthie change after reading the entire vignette? Explain.

8. In “Edna’s Ruthie,” a young narrator describes a likeable, yet odd adult named Ruthie. Read the passage carefully. In a well-written essay, explain how the writer uses literary elements such as diction and figurative language to portray Ruthie’s childlike character.
Edna’s Ruthie

1  Ruthie, tall skinny lady with red lipstick and blue babushka, one blue sock and one green because she forgot, is the only grown-up we know who likes to play. She takes her dog BoBo for a walk and laughs all by herself, that Ruthie. She doesn’t need anybody to laugh with, she just laughs.

2  She is Edna’s daughter, the lady who owns the big building next door, three apartments front and back. Every week Edna is screaming at somebody, and every week somebody has to move away. Once she threw out a pregnant lady just because she owned a duck . . . and it was a nice duck too. But Ruthie lives here and Edna can’t throw her out because Ruthie is her daughter.

3  Ruthie came one day, it seemed, out of nowhere. Angel Vargas was trying to teach us how to whistle. Then we heard someone whistling – beautiful like the Emperor’s nightingale – and when we turned around there was Ruthie.

4  Sometimes we go shopping and take her with us, but she never comes inside the stores and if she does she keeps looking around her like a wild animal in a house for the first time.

5  She likes candy. When we go to Mr. Benny’s grocery she gives us money to buy her some. She says make sure it’s the soft kind because her teeth hurt. Then she promises to see the dentist next week, but when next week comes, she doesn’t go.

6  Ruthie sees lovely things everywhere. I might be telling her a joke and she’ll stop and say: The moon is beautiful like a balloon. Or somebody might be singing and she’ll point to a few clouds: Look, Marlon Brando. Or a sphinx winking. Or my left shoe.

7  Once some friends of Edna’s came to visit and asked Ruthie if she wanted to go with them to play bingo. The car motor was running, and Ruthie stood on the steps wondering whether to go. Should I go, Ma? She asked the gray shadow behind the second-floor screen. I don’t care, says the screen, go if you want. Ruthie looked at the ground. What do you think, Ma? Do what you want, how should I know? Ruthie looked at the ground some more. The car with the motor running waited fifteen minutes and then they left. When we brought out the deck of cards that night, we let Ruthie deal.

8  There were many things Ruthie could have been if she wanted to. Not only is she a good whistler, but she can sing and dance too. She had lots of job offers when she was young, but she never took them. She got married instead and moved away to a pretty house outside the city. Only thing I can’t understand is why Ruthie is living on Mango Street if she doesn’t have to, why is she sleeping on a couch in her mother’s living room when she has a real house all her own, but she says she’s just visiting and next weekend her husband’s going to take her home. But the weekends come and go and Ruthie stays. No matter. We are glad because she is our friend.

9  I like showing Ruthie the books I take out of the library. Books are wonderful, Ruthie says, and then she runs her hand over them as if she could read them in braille. They’re wonderful, wonderful, but I can’t read anymore. I get headaches. I need to go to the eye doctor next week. I used to write children’s books once, did I tell you?

10  One day I memorized all of “The Walrus and the Carpenter” because I wanted Ruthie to hear me. “The sun was shining on the sea, shining with all his might . . .” Ruthie looked at the sky and her eyes got watery at times. Finally I came to the last lines: “But answer came there none – and this was scarcely odd, because they’d eaten every one . . .” She took a long time looking at me before she opened her mouth, and then she said, You have the most beautiful teeth I have ever seen, and went inside.