**Book Three *Poisonwood Bible***

**Character Analysis**

**LT: Use literary terms to describe and analyze selections (2.1eii) and analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text…and develop the theme (2.1b)**

**Essential Question: What’s the relationship between character’s voice and character’s purpose?**

The study of voice incorporates analysis of diction, detail, figurative language, syntax (sentence arrangement and word order), and tone.

* Nancy Dean's *Discovering Voice: Voice Lessons for Middle and High School*. Dean states, "Voice is created through *conscious choices*. In other words, the writer, painter, or musician purposefully chooses his or her 'tools'(words, colors, instruments) and uses them in ways that create a certain effect."
* Identify the ways in which the "color and texture" of the narratives differ

For example, the character Ruth May is only five years old. An early line within one of her narratives is, "If somebody was hungry, why would they have a big fat belly? I don't know." 5 The content of this line is immediately suggestive of a younger character because it is asking a practical question based on a visual observation, something children often do. As students look at the diction in the lines, the phrase "big fat belly" sticks out as suggestive of a younger speaker because of the redundancy of words and the choice of the word "belly" over "stomach," a slightly more specific and mature word. The final sentence, "I don't know," is a simple statement demonstrating the lack of knowledge of the character, and its placement directly after the question shows the speaker does not attempt to puzzle out the question, an action an older character might attempt.

Students can easily juxtapose Ruth May's sentence with 17-year-old Rachel's statement that opens her first narrative, "Man oh man, are we in for it now, was my thinking about the Congo from the instant we first set foot. We are supposed to be calling the shots here, but it doesn't look to me like we're in charge of a thing, not even our own selves." 6 The content of Rachel's statement is clearly different from Ruth May's in that Rachel is commenting on the larger place (Congo) and the larger differences she sees (us vs. them), while Ruth May looked at one specific visual image and could not connect to a larger concept. When looking at Rachel's diction, there is the use of a slang phrase "man oh man," calling to mind teenagers and their fondness for more casual language and language experimentation. There is also the structure of the sentences with the parenthetical comments lending a caustic tone to the statements, which is much more sophisticated than Ruth May's simple question that she fails to puzzle through. The changes in narrative speaker from chapter to chapter provide the students with the opportunity to compare the voice changes and see the striking differences between the diction, syntax, and tone of 17-year-old Rachel and five-year-old Ruth May. This way they can begin to identify word choices and structures that seem to be unique to each character and consider the larger function of those choices. What is it about the phrase "man oh man" that calls to mind a teenage voice? What effect is made on the reader by using this phrase? What does the use of the phrase tell us about the character using it? By extension then, what can we, as readers, begin to think about the character's purpose in telling us her side of this story?

Groups: Closely read and analyze the voice in the following pages

* Orleanna: 191, 201
* Adah: 276-278
* Leah: 235-236
* Ruth May: 271-273
* Rachel: 268-270

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Element of Voice** | **Strong Examples that develop its “color and texture” (in-text citation)** | **Analysis: What does that example show about the character’s personality and point of view?**  | **Analysis: What does it show about the character’s purpose (universal theme)?** |
| **Diction (word choice, vocabulary, slang, jargon, colloquialisms)** |  |  |  |
| **Detail****(what things and descriptions are included and why the character talks about those details and not others)** |  |  |  |
| **Figurative** **Language** |  |  |  |
| **Syntax (sentence arrangement, length, type or word order)****Purpose:****Interrogative, declarative, imperative, exclamatory** |  |  |  |
| **Tone (attitude toward a topic)** |  |  |  |