

This complimentary **voice** lesson comes from the Northern Nevada Writing Project's "Going Deep with 6 Traits Language" Guide. Information on ordering a copy of this 194-page resource can be found by visiting <http://nnwp.org> and checking out the "NNWP Publications for Purchase" page.

Here's a **voice** lesson plan that focuses on perspective:

A Character's Decalogue

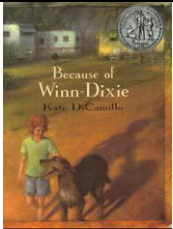
From Dena Harrison, Northern Nevada Writing Project Teacher Consultant

Trait alert: A **decalogue** is a list of ten statements that its writer personally believes. In the olden days, decalogues were mostly about religion and morals (e.g. The Ten Commandments). Today, they can be about any topic. In the spirit of structured (but personal) idea development, I believe every writer should compose a personal decalogue from time to time. Because this is actually a voice lesson plan, this assignment asks students to create a decalogue in the voice of a character, and then incorporate the list of ten items into a story

Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo is a fantastic read for young adults and adults alike. In chapter four of the book, Opal's father (the preacher) tells his daughter ten things she should know about her absent mother. The entire chapter is based on not only the list he comes up with, but also how the Preacher and Opal interact while he shares his list out loud with her; it's a remarkable structure for a chapter. Later in the book, Opal composes her own similar list--ten ways to recognize my dog (Winn Dixie)--when her pet goes missing.

This writing assignment asks students to do three things: write a personal decalogue for themselves (as practice and to familiarize themselves with the structure); on a later day, create a decalogue for an imaginary character; and then, in the spirit of Because of Winn Dixie, it asks them to write a short story where two characters interact as one character shares his/her decalogue out loud.

Having to write a decalogue for a character, and then having the character explain it to another character is an excellent (though challenging) writing assignment that stresses thinking from another character's perspective, which is an excellent way to promote voice.



Hey writers and teachers! Get a copy of Because of Winn Dixie by Katie DiCamillo. Read aloud the last paragraph of chapter three, then read all of chapter four. Talk to your students about how the fourth chapter is a list of ten interesting facts being talked about by two characters. Some writers might have been satisfied keeping the information as a simple list of ten things, but DiCamillo has her two characters interact as one of them shares the ten things with the other. Ask your students to remember details on how the two characters interact. Ask them to recall what interesting new things we learn about all the characters based on this interaction.

Next, share the word *decalogue* with your students. It's an ancient word, and it means a list of ten things that a person believes and writes down. "Ten Things I Believe with All my Heart and Soul" is a good topic for a decalogue; the list you create when you're 12 years old would be very different from the list you might create when you're 22...or 62 years old. "Ten places I'd like to go while I'm still young" is a good decalogue topic. "Ten friends I wish I hadn't parted ways with (and reasons why)" is another. Brainstorm interesting ideas for personal decalogues with your students. Talk about how decalogues can tell you a lot about the person who writes them, and how if a character in a short story shared a decalogue, how much we might learn about that character. Students are very capable of creating personal decalogues.

Once students have created a personal decalogue, challenge them on a later day to create a decalogue for a character they make up. What does another person believe strongly enough in to write down? If students need ideas for interesting characters to create decalogues for, the chart on the next page might inspire them.

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What characters might write an interesting decalogue?

(Choose one or come up with one on your own)

a senior citizen	a homeless person	a street performer
a soldier	a pilot	an inventor
a war veteran	a lonely person	a misunderstood genius
a drop-out	a circus performer	a competitive athlete
a hermit	a sailor	an artist
a single parent	a musician	an explorer
a historical character	a doctor	a gambler

What topic might your character have ten things to say about?

(Choose one or come up with one on your own)

money	happiness	charity
education	power	true love
travel	friendship	forgiveness
technology	adventure	family
respect	fighting	fame
religion	pollution	health
wisdom	crime	politics

Students’ writing instructions: Chapter four of Because of Winn Dixie has one character (the preacher) sharing a list of ten beliefs with another character (Opal). The two characters interact with each other as one character does most of the talking. We are interested in the preacher's list more, because the characters are interacting while it is being shared, and we learn things about not only Opal and the preacher, but also about Opal's missing mother. This is a very well-written chapter.

For this writer's challenge, you will do three things. First, you will choose an interesting character and a topic you believe that your character would be able to say intelligent things about. The two lists above might help you do this. Second, you will compose a list of ten things your imaginary character believes about the topic; really make the list sound like it might come from a real person. Third, you will write a very short story--much like chapter four of Because of Winn Dixie--where two characters interact while one of the characters shares his/her list of ten beliefs out loud.

As you write your short story, try to focus just as much on the interaction between the characters as you do the list that's being shared. Have the characters do something while they are talking. Using action words to make better descriptions is a great technique used by real writers.



WritingFix

An interactive, on-line version of the preceding lesson “A Character’s Decalogue” exists at NNWP’s sponsored website: <http://writingfix.org>. Check it out! It’s free to use! Go to Writingfix.org. In the left-hand margin find either the “Voice Homepage” or the “Chapter Books and the 6 Traits homepage.” Click on the lesson with the picture of the cover of Because of Winn Dixie by Katie DiCamillo.

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Five Essays to Inspire Dialogue Among Teachers:

These five essays come with embedded Trait Post-Its so that teachers can not only discuss each essay’s message but also think about specific writing traits in new and unique ways.

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The Trait Modules:

These six modules contain lesson plans and resources from a variety of first- through twelfth-grade classrooms. These modules are not about giving away the lessons and resources to just the teachers who teach the exact same grade. The lessons and resources should not be quickly dismissed if it’s discovered that the providing teacher teaches a different age or socio-economic level of student.

These lessons and resources come from teachers who have gone out of their way to help students own trait language in their classrooms. Helping a student own an academic language is a universal concept, not a grade specific one.

The goal of these six modules is to promote “adaptive talk.” If, while exploring these modules, a teacher says, “I like the idea here, but I’d make it look different for my students, and here’s how,” then that teacher has succeeded in using this guide in the way it was intended.

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