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CI 403  
Professor Willis  
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## **Ackley and Stradlater as Foils: Comparing and Contrasting Supporting Characters**

### **Time and Setting**

The lesson is a fifty-minute lesson in a Sophomore English Honors class. The class consists of twenty-five students, with thirteen females and twelve males. There are thirteen white students, five African-American students, four Asian students, two Hispanic students and one Native American student in the classroom.

### **Theory into Practice Background**

It is important for students to recognize the significance of writing and how it can develop thought. As Burke states, “writing is an activity that forces thought: You cannot write without thinking, for to arrange language into meaningful units- sentences, phrases, poems, narratives- is to use the mind” (Burke 245). Using a variety of writing forms can help students not only comprehend a text, its characters and literary devices, but also make connections between the novel and themselves. In this lesson, the primary activity deals with learning a literary term and analyzing the development of characters in J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*. However, other writing activities at the beginning and end of the lesson focus on the student in terms of self-reflection and application. The first activity of the class, a journal called a Quick Write, is meant to get the students engaged in the concept of how others are perceived versus how they perceived themselves. This is in connection with the unit’s overall theme of identity exploration and transitions into how Pencey Prep students, Ackley and Stradlater, are portrayed by Holden. This also gives me the opportunity to present a literary term, the foil, which is a concept the sophomore students will see again in future English classes. The Foil Handout gives students the chance to work with a partner and reflect on how different (or similar) the two characters are. This compilation of spoken and written ideas will help the students conclude on whether the two are foils for one another. The last five minutes of the class are saved for the Exit Slip, a final question for students to respond to that bring the lesson to a close. The particular question for this lesson not only encourages students to remember what ‘foil’ is, but also consider the significance of perception and how *Catcher in the Rye* would be different if the point-of-view switched over to one of Holden’s classmates. Writing is an acquired trait that is used beyond the classroom, a crucial component in helping students not only express themselves, but also a means of retaining information and developing critical thinking beyond the assigned text and classroom.

As mentioned previously, the lesson touches on how students identify themselves versus how others perceive them. This briefly explores the over-arching theme of the unit, identity exploration, asking the essential question: is how others identify us more important than how we identify ourselves? Students write about identity and perception through the Quick Write, but the discussion is also vital in this area for students to develop how they want to discuss such themes. Burke quotes Arthur Applebee, who believes that, “only in conversation guided by others will students develop the tacit knowledge necessary to participate on their own” (20). By developing questions, spoken and written, I hope to engage students in a conversation that deals with identity of not

only in the characters of *Catcher in the Rye*, but their own identities.

### **Objectives**

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Define the meaning of the literary term 'foil'.
- Distinguish similarities and difference between CTR characters Ackley and Stradlater.
- Practice successful communication skills when working with a partner.

### **Materials**

- Copy of *Catcher in the Rye*
- Foil handout

### **Preparation**

The only preparation involved is copying the appropriate amount of handouts for the class, as well as writing the Quick Write topic on the board so students can begin on it as soon as they walk into the classroom.

### **Procedure**

- Have students begin working on the Quick Write (a regular activity in the classroom) as soon as they walk in. Allow **ten minutes** for them to work on it.
  - Question is: "How would one of your classmates describe your personality? How would you describe yourself?"
- After collecting Quick Write, ask class, "did you see a difference in how you described yourself and how your classmate did?" **Discuss for five minutes.**
- Pass out foil handout, explain the definition of 'foil' and ask for other examples other than from the handout (**five minutes**).
- Have students get into pairs and work on the handout, in which they are suppose to compare and contrast Ackley and Stradlater and, using this information, determine if they are foils (**ten minutes**).
- Reconvene, make similar table on chalkboard and ask for students' ideas (**fifteen minutes**). Encourage students to add ideas on the handout they may have missed.
- In last **five minutes**, have students answer to the Exit Slip question.
  - Question is: "Define the meaning of 'foil'. Additionally, to turn the tables, how would Stradlater or Ackley describe Holden if they were the narrator?"

### **Discussion Ideas**

- Why do you think writers incorporate foils for characters in movies and books?
- What constitutes a 'foil'? What are key characteristics writers use to create foils among characters?
- Does Holden give fairly accurate descriptions of Ackley and Stradlater? Or do you think it is completely biased?
- Expand on the Exit Slip question, discussing the question with the whole class

### **Bilingual/ESL and Englishes Accommodations (ELL Spanish-Speaking student)**

This lesson involves several moments of discussion, whether it is among themselves or in front of the class, as well as written responses and note-taking. Prior to the lesson, I

would have a discussion with my ELL student to see how they feel about working with others, and who they feel most comfortable working with and who I know will be kind and helpful. This way, when working in partners, there are several students I can choose from that would be beneficial to the student. For my students who speak AAE, I would not mind if they spoke that way in discussion and group work, as long as they understand others may not understand and may need clarification. As for the written work, I would ask they use “classroom English”, since I hate to call it standard written English, since they are addressing me as their teacher.

### **Special Education Accommodations (Student with Asperger’s Syndrome)**

A student with Asperger’s tends to have a difficult time understanding other people’s emotions and working with classmates. To help ease the anxiety this can cause the student or another student that has to work with them, I would make close observations of the student and who they work best with throughout the year. I would even consider having a ‘buddy’ for the student, a classmate who likes to help and work with them and one the student with Asperger’s is comfortable working with.

### **Assessment**

The Foil Handout is collected and assessed to see if they completed the assignment and reflected on the characters’ striking personalities. The question on the bottom is the most important, because this is where they develop the ideas from the chart to make a final observation about the characters. The Exit Slip is also an essential piece of assessment for this particular lesson. The first part is meant to help students with their ability to recall information, as well as help me learn who has fully comprehended the concept and who needs more help, which could be reviewing the term the following day. For most in class, a homework rubric based on the one provided by Jim Burke in *The English Teacher’s Companion*. Components graded include completion, idea development, writing quality, and neatness. Comments and feedback would be given as much as possible.

### **Extension Ideas**

In my discussion ideas, I had mentioned the Exit Slip being expanded into a discussion subject. This could be taken further given an extra day by having students write a piece in which they put themselves in the perspective of either Ackley or Stradlater, describe themselves as they see fit, as well as describe Holden in their perspectives. This could show students the significance of the narrator and how this can effect the novel. The concept of foils can also be brought up again later in the novel in which students can look at new characters and determine if they are foils, like Holden’s former teachers Mr. Spencer and Mr. Antolini.

### **Source of Activity**

I would like acknowledge Professor Arlette Willis for the Quick Write and Exit Slip ideas.

### **Resources and References**

Burke, Jim. *The English Teacher’s Companion*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2008.

### **Illinois State English Language Arts Goals**

- **State Goal 2.A:** Students understand how literary elements and techniques are used to convey meaning.

- Through this lesson, students learn about foils and why authors use them in their writing. Discussion is used to help this understanding and how foils effect various components of the novel, whether it be their effect on characters or the overall plot.

- **State Goal 4.B:** Students speak effectively using language appropriate to the situation and audience.

- With my encouragement, students will participate in not only a whole-class discussion but will also have to communicate with a partner in order to successfully complete the assignment. They will need to work together to develop similarities and differences between Ackley and Stradlater and draw from these ideas to explain how they are foils. They will then have to present their ideas to the class.

### **Reflection**

While the assignment touches briefly on the concept of how others identify us versus how we identify ourselves, an essential question of the unit, I wish there was more time to apply it into the lesson. The original intent of the lesson was to introduce a literary term in context to the text, but upon bringing up the identity conflict, I wish I had an additional twenty minutes! I also wish I had additional time to use one of my extension ideas, in which students would write about Holden in Stradlater or Ackley's perspective. I could have assigned this for homework, but given that they are suppose to have a quiz the following day, I did not want to give them that much work in the beginning of the unit.

## Exploring Literary Terms: Foil

**Foil:** A character that serves to emphasize opposing traits in another character, two characters that have striking differences.

**Pop culture examples:**

Bart Simpson and Millhouse in *The Simpsons*  
Emma Pillsbury and Sue Sylvester in *Glee*

**Classic literature examples:**

Romeo and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*  
Sherlock Holmes and Watson in *Sherlock Holmes*  
Ebenezer Scrooge and Bob Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol*

Since we have started *Catcher in the Rye*, we have been introduced to various people in Holden's life at Pencey Prep. Consider two of his closest classmates, Ackley and Stradlater and how Holden describes their physical appearance, their mannerisms and overall personality. Compare and contrast the two characters below and on the back of this page, if necessary.

Ackley	Both	Stradlater

**Conclusion:** After comparing and contrasting, do you think the two characters are foils? Explain your answer with examples from your chart.

# Homework Rubric

## 1 Completion

- Your work satisfies all requirements of the assignment.

## 2 Idea Development

- You use effective examples to illustrate and support what you mean.

## 3 Writing Quality

- Your sentences are coherent.
- They are grammatically correct/
- they do not have spelling or punctuation errors.

## 4 Neatness/ Aesthetics

- Your handwriting is legible and neat.
- Your paper is in good condition.

**/4 is your score.**