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Tiered Graphic Organizers

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Tiered Graphic Organizers Overview

One way to improve students' learning and performance across the grade levels in a wide range of content areas and with diverse students is by utilizing graphic organizers in classroom lessons. Graphic organizers are visual representations that help students gather and sort information, see patterns and relationships, clarify concepts, and organize information. Graphic organizers have a way of connecting several pieces of isolated information by taking new information and filing it into an existing framework. Old information is retrieved in the process, and the new information is attached. By using graphic organizers in the classroom, teachers are helping students make connections and assimilate new information into what they already know.

Understanding how the brain works helps us understand why graphic organizers are valuable tools for learning. Educational brain research says that our brains seek patterns so that information can be made meaningful. In her book, Karen Olsen (1995) states, "From brain research we have come to understand that the brain is a pattern-seeking device in search of meaning and that learning is the acquisition of mental programs for using what we understand." Other researchers believe that graphic organizers are one of the most powerful ways to build semantic memories (Sprengr 1999). Eric Jensen (1998) states that semantic memory is "activated by association, similarities, or contrasts." Graphic organizers assist students with such necessary connections.

The brain does this by storing information similar to how a graphic organizer shows information. It screens large amounts of information and looks for patterns that are linked together. The brain is able to extract meaning more easily from a visual format like a graphic organizer than from written words on a page. Graphic organizers not only help students manage information, but they also offer information in a way that students can understand at a glance. When these connections happen, the brain transfers the information from short-term memory to long-term memory. This means that teachers who use graphic organizers help their students manage all the information they are presented with each day.

Because students are at different readiness levels, it makes perfect sense to differentiate lessons with tiered graphic organizers. Ideas for tiering graphic organizers for different readiness levels are listed on the following page. Some teachers, especially high school teachers, worry that students will just copy from other students who have modifications on their graphic organizers. They also note that some of their students don't like to be singled out with modified work. This can be resolved by assigning groups different kinds of graphic organizers within one lesson. An example of this would be to give one group Venn diagrams, another group T-charts, and a third group matrices. The information can still be modified as needed, but it won't be so obvious that the answers can be copied, because they are being recorded on different organizers.

Tiered Graphic Organizers Overview *(cont.)*

Steps for Using Tiered Graphic Organizers to Differentiate

1. Pick the grade level objective you will be covering.
2. Decide upon the specific skills, concepts, or generalizations to be learned.
3. Choose a graphic organizer for your on-grade-level students to use as an assignment. Then, make modifications to the graphic organizer so that it is accessible to all students. Below are some ideas for making these modifications.
 - ▶ **English Language Learners**—level the text in examples on the graphic organizers, use a word bank with definitions, allow students to answer in pictures and/or words instead of writing sentences to summarize, label the titles and parts on the graphic organizers, let them verbally explain the graphic organizers, give individual or small group instruction, provide recorded instructions or reminders using podcast software, etc.
 - ▶ **Below Grade Level**—provide a few examples already filled in on the graphic organizers, give them an appropriately leveled word bank, let them write only one or two sentences to summarize the graphic organizer, label the titles and parts on the graphic organizers, provide lines to write on in the graphic organizers, simplify the directions, ask for fewer examples, etc.
 - ▶ **On Grade Level**—These students get the on-grade-level graphic organizer that is appropriate for their level of readiness.
 - ▶ **Above Grade Level**—increase complexity by adding another circle to a Venn diagram or another column to the T-chart, assign more ambiguous items to compare/contrast, give students a sophisticated word bank, let them work in homogeneous groups, let them summarize the graphic organizers and then provide their evaluation of the situation, etc.
4. Distribute the graphic organizers to students. You can have them work in homogeneous groups or individually.
5. Assess students as they work on the graphic organizers to see if the appropriate accommodations have been made. Make adjustments as needed.
6. After students have completed the graphic organizers, assess their work and make notes for future tiered graphic organizers. Some students might need more modification and others will need less. Keep the groups flexible and move students as necessary.

Understanding Characters

Student Reproducible Tiered Graphic Organizers

Name _____

Character Progress Report

Text: _____ Character: _____

Directions: Rate the character on the different attributes. Provide text evidence to support your rating. Use another sheet of paper to answer the question at the bottom of the page.

The rating marks stand for the following: – no, never; ✓ possible, sometimes; + yes, always

Attribute	Rating (– ✓ +)	Text Evidence
intense		
obliging		
discerning		
gregarious		
circumspect		

Would you consider this character a protagonist or an antagonist? Explain your answer.

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Skills Summary

Language Arts Content

Analyzing characters

Literacy Skill

Understanding character development

Differentiation Strategy

Tiered graphic organizers
(See pages 66–67 for more information.)

Differentiation Management Tip

Make an audio recording of the attribute words on the graphic organizers for struggling readers. They can listen to these as they fill out their organizers.

Overview of Activity

- ▶ Students will document the development of a character while reading a narrative text.
- ▶ Students will then complete an attribute chart using text evidence to support their ratings.
- ▶ As a culminating activity, students will write from the perspective of the character in response to events that occur in the text.

How This Strategy Benefits Students

- ▶ More complex graphic organizers allow **above-grade-level** students to delve deeper into topics without working on completely different assignments than the rest of the class.
- ▶ **On-grade-level** students benefit from graphic organizers because they guide students in organizing the content they are learning.
- ▶ The scaffolding provided for **below-grade-level** students allows them to have success with the same activities as other students in the class.
- ▶ Graphic organizers are an excellent strategy for **English language learners** because they do not rely too heavily on language. Knowledge can be shared in multiple ways.

Learning Standards

- ▶ Students will understand how characters are developed in a narrative.
- ▶ Students will expand their vocabulary using leveled graphic organizers.

Understanding Characters *(cont.)*



Whole-Class Activity

1. Place students into homogeneous groups according to ability levels. Distribute copies of a narrative text to the class. This text can be leveled or the same text can be used for the entire class. This activity can be done using a short story, narrative poem, or a novel.
2. Tell students that they will be looking closely at a main character from a text. Distribute copies of the *Character Progress Report* (pages 85–87). Tell students that they will be rating their characters according to the character attributes on this page. Point out the rating guide at the top of the charts so students know how to answer. They must also give text evidence in the next column to support their answers.
3. Have students read the selected texts in their homogeneous groups. They should answer questions on their graphic organizers as they read. Instruct students to pause every five minutes to work on their graphic organizers. Students will record text evidence to support their ratings.
4. Once the class has finished reading and filling in their graphic organizers, have them share their answers in their groups and then work together to come up with two additional attributes to complete the chart.
5. Students should discuss the question at the bottom of the *Character Progress Report* in their groups and record their group's answer on the handout.
6. The culminating activity will be the *Character Blog* (page 88). Students will write a blog entry from the perspective of their character responding to an event from the text.

Assessment

1. Grade the *Character Progress Report* to ensure students used text evidence to support their ratings of the attributes.
2. Use the writing rubric at the bottom of the *Character Blog* handout to score the student blogs.

Anchor Activities

- ▶ Students who finish early can create some fictional responses from friends, family, or the general public who read the blog.
- ▶ Let students design their own character activity sheets. These can be used with others in the class or in future lessons.
- ▶ Students should use a character progress report to create an original character. Then have them write a story about this character.

Name _____

Character Progress Report



Text: _____ Character: _____

Directions: Rate the character on the different attributes. Provide text evidence to support your rating. Use another sheet of paper to answer the question at the bottom of the page.

The rating marks stand for the following: – no, never; ✓ possible, sometimes; + yes, always

Attribute	Rating (–, ✓, +)	Text Evidence
earnest (sincere, honest)		
agreeable (helpful)		
perceptive (wise, clever)		
sociable (friendly)		
discreet (smart, wise)		

Would you consider this character a *protagonist* (a positive and helpful character) or an *antagonist* (a negative and troublesome character)? Explain your answer.

Name _____

Character Progress Report



Text: _____ Character: _____

Directions: Rate the character on the different attributes. Provide text evidence to support your rating. Use another sheet of paper to answer the question at the bottom of the page.

The rating marks stand for the following: – no, never; ✓ possible, sometimes; + yes, always

Attribute	Rating (– ✓ +)	Text Evidence
earnest		
agreeable		
perceptive		
sociable		
discreet		

Would you consider this character a *protagonist* or an *antagonist*? Explain your answer.

Name _____

Character Progress Report



Text: _____ Character: _____

Directions: Rate the character on the different attributes. Provide text evidence to support your rating. Use another sheet of paper to answer the question at the bottom of the page.

The rating marks stand for the following: – no, never; ✓ possible, sometimes; + yes, always

Attribute	Rating (– ✓ +)	Text Evidence
intense		
obliging		
discerning		
gregarious		
circumspect		

Would you consider this character a *protagonist* or an *antagonist*? Explain your answer.

Name _____

Character Blog

The term *blog* comes from *web log*, which is an online journal people use to describe events from their life or the world around them and their thoughts about these events. A blog is written in first person and the intended audience is a group of friends, family members, or the general public.

Directions: Step into the mind of your character and write a blog entry from his or her perspective. Be sure to describe the event as if you are the character and include the character's thoughts about what happened. Use the information from your graphic organizer to help you.

Writing Rubric

Written in first person	/25 points
Description of event(s)	/25 points
Thoughts on event(s)	/25 points
Correct spelling/grammar/syntax	/25 points
Total:	/100 points