Subject: English Language Arts

Title: Influence of Setting on Characters in Portal 2

Author: David Hunter, Teacher

School / Organization, City and State / Province: Bellevue Big Picture School, Bellevue, WA

Grade Level: 7

Standards Met:

*English Language Arts Standards*

Reading Literature, Key Ideas and Details

*Common Core Standards*

*Reading Literature 7.3 Key Ideas and Details*: Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

Time Needed: Two 50 minute periods

Objective(s): Examine and describe character and setting. Analyze how characters are driven or influenced by the setting.

Summary: Students take notes on the Characters and Setting in the introduction and first few levels of Portal 2. From these notes and descriptions they examine how characters are influenced by the setting of the story.

Vocabulary: Setting, Character, Plot

Teacher Materials Needed: None

Student Materials Needed: Portal 2, student handout, writing utensil
PART ONE:
Introductory Activity: 15 minutes (3-5 minutes writing, 5-7 minutes discussing, 5 minutes defining objective)

1. Provide the students with a short writing or discussion prompt to get them thinking about stories or even video games as stories.
   Possible Prompts:
   “What makes a story?”
   “Do stories have to be written?”
   “Can video games tell stories?”
   “Have you ever played a video game that also tells a great story?”

2. Ask for volunteers to share a few ideas from their response to the prompt.
3. Bring the discussion to present the idea of looking at video games as a text or analyzing the stories in video games the same way we analyze stories in literature or books.
4. Define Objective: Clearly define the learning objectives and expectations for the activities.
5. Make sure students know they will need to pay attention to details as they play the game. The more details they notice, the deeper they will be able to analyze the story of the game.

Implementation: about 30 minutes

1. Gameplay and Note-taking: Students should take part in the game while taking notes on character and setting.
2. See the provided handouts.
3. Students may either work alone, taking notes as they go, or in a small group, alternating playing and taking notes.
4. During this stage, students should be concentrating on gathering detailed observations of the characters and the setting.

Closing Activity: (if ending for the day, if not continue on) - 5 minutes
1. Have a brief discussion or provide a prompt for an exit ticket to tie together some of the lesson’s ideas.
2. Ask students if they think the video game tells a story or if they found story elements similar to literary stories.
3. You may want to collect the students’ handouts to observe how they completed the first side and return to them during the next part.
PART TWO:

Introductory Activity: 5 minutes
1. Students should review the notes they took while playing the game.

Implementation: about 40 minutes (7 think, 3 pair, 10 share discussion, 20 discussing or writing)
1. This is a Think-Pair-Share on how the setting in the game influences the characters.
2. Students should take several minutes to answer the questions on the back of handout.
3. After recording their own ideas, have the students briefly discuss their ideas with a partner.
4. Ask students to share ideas they wrote down or discussed.
5. Students should add to their notes if they hear an idea they agree with.

Class Discussion or Writing Assignment - 20 minutes

Writing Activity
1. Students should write a short expository essay on how the setting influences the characters in Portal 2.
2. Have the students support their ideas with specific examples from the game.

Class Discussion
1. Continue discussing how the setting influences the characters.
2. Use a Socratic seminar or other class discussion method to give all students a chance to share and discuss.
3. Use questions to encourage deeper group discussion and facilitate the discussion to stay on task.

Possible discussion questions:
   How would the characters act in a different setting?
   Would the characters be happy to be somewhere else? Why?
   Can the characters make their own choices?
   How would the story change if it were in a different time period?

Closing Activity: 5 minutes
1. Have students complete an exit ticket in the last few minutes of class.
2. Base the exit ticket question on where you intend to go after this lesson. Suggested options below.

Literary Analysis
1. Continue with a traditional literary analysis lesson or use similar questions to analyze a piece of reading.
2. This will facilitate in students’ transfer of the ideas in this lesson to analyzing literature.
3. To lead in to this lesson, use the exit ticket question, “While analyzing Portal 2, what did you learn that would help you analyze a written story?”

Creative Writing
1. Challenge students to write a creative adaptation of the beginning of Portal 2.
2. Have them use their notes and focus on describing the characters and setting.
3. Continue to teach any elements of creative writing or adaptation that you have been working on.
4. To lead into this exercise, use the exit ticket question, “How would the story of Portal 2 be similar or different if it were a written short story?”

**Grading:**

*Pre-Assessment - Optional*

Provide this simple assessment before starting the unit. This is particularly effective if you intend to have students write and essay analyzing the influence of setting on characters in Portal 2. Compare this pre-assessment to the essay at the end. Use the rubric to gauge what students know at the beginning of the lesson and what they are able to do at the end.

*Pre-Assessment - Ask students to think of a story that they recently read (or possibly watched). You may also want to use a story that you have all read in class or read a short story together. Students should consider that story and complete the following prompts and questions.*

- Describe the **characters** of this story:
- Describe the **setting** (time and place) of this story
- How are the characters **influenced** by the setting?

**Description and Analysis Rubric for Written Analysis of Character and Setting in Portal 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>4 Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>3 Meets Expectations</th>
<th>2 Progressing</th>
<th>1 Not There Yet</th>
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<td><strong>Descriptions of Character</strong></td>
<td>Extensively described each of the following for both characters: • how they look • how they act • their goals • their possible feelings • challenges they face</td>
<td>Described each of the following for both characters: • how they look • how they act • their goals • their possible feelings • challenges they face</td>
<td>Described only some of the following for both characters OR described all of the following for only one character: • how they look • how they act • their goals • their possible feelings • challenges they face</td>
<td>Minimal description of the following for either character: • how they look • how they act • their goals • their possible feelings • challenges they face</td>
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- Provided evidence from the video game.
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**TASK:** Examine and describe character and setting.

**Instructions:**
As you play or observe the game, take notes below on the character and setting.

**TIP:**
Press ESC to pause the game and write down your ideas.

**Character:**
Describe each character. Describe what they look like, how they act, their goals, and how you think they feel.

**Setting:**
Describe the places the characters are in. Describe how the place looks. In what time period do you think it is?

**Summarize your notes when you are done playing:**
Who are the main characters? What challenges do the characters face? How would you describe the atmosphere or mood created by the setting?

**KEY TERMS:**
- **Character:** The people (or robots) in a story.
- **Setting:** The time and place of a story.
- **Plot:** The events that happen in a story.
**TASK:** Analyze how the *characters* are influenced by the *setting*.

**Instructions:** Review your notes as you answer the questions below. Provide details and examples.

**Questions:**
Are the characters in conflict with the setting? What do the characters want? Does the setting keep them from getting what they want?

How do you think the characters feel about the setting?

**Summary:**
Write about all the ways that you think the setting influences the characters. What things do the characters do because of the setting they are in?
Answer the questions as you play the game.

**Introduction of the game**

**Setting:**

1. **Where** are you?

2. **When** does this take place? (circle one)
   
   - Past
   - Present
   - Future

3. Describe the **place** you are.

4. How do you think this **place** makes your **character feel**?
   
   (use the feelings word bank)

**Courtesy Call**

5. **Where** are you?

6. How much **time** has passed since the last scene? (circle one)
   
   - 1 day
   - 1 year
   - A long, long time

7. Describe the **place** you are.

8. How do you think this **place** makes your **character feel**?
   
   (use the feelings word bank)
Character:
9. A new **character** comes to your door. What does this character **look** like?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

10. How does he **act**?

______________________________________________________________________

11. How do you think this character **feels** about **where** he is?

______________________________________________________________________

12. You move to a new **place**. What does it **look and sound like**?

______________________________________________________________________

13. How do you think it makes your **character feel**?

______________________________________________________________________

14. What are the **characters** (including your character) **trying to do**?

______________________________________________________________________

15. How do the characters **feel** about this **environment** or **place**?

______________________________________________________________________

16. How would you describe the **atmosphere** or **mood** created by the **setting**? (Gloomy, cheerful, mysterious, threatening, ?)

______________________________________________________________________

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<th>Feelings Word Bank</th>
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<td>happy</td>
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<tr>
<td>good</td>
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