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Lesson 4

Literary Terms: Conflict

Objectives

- To define types of conflicts and apply them to *Red Scarf Girl*
- To use deductive reasoning skills in determining character conflicts
- To imagine various outcomes if characters had made different choices

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson should be introduced as students read from “A Search in Passing” to “An Educable Child.” Students have now read enough of the book to realize that there are numerous issues occurring within characters’ minds, between individual characters, and between some characters and the society and government of their country. In addition to learning the types of conflict, students create their own examples of each. They then dramatize conflicts (similar to playing charades); classmates try to guess the type of conflict portrayed.

Students apply types of conflict to several scenarios from the text. Students identify who and what are involved in the conflict, the type of conflict, the root of the problem, how the conflict has been handled or resolved to this point in the book, and the effects of this resolution. Students also improve paragraph writing skills by writing paragraphs in which they imagine how the conflict’s outcome would have been different had a different decision been made.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 10**, and ask students to consider the types of conflict, their definitions, and examples in part A. For part B, ask students to create an original conflict for each type and to pick one example to dramatize for their classmates. Have members of the class guess which types of conflict are demonstrated.
2. Distribute **Handout 11**, and point out five conflicts that appear in the book. Direct students to complete the exercise either individually or in small groups.

Suggested Responses:

1. Type—Character/Self
Character involved—*Ji-li*

Cause—*Ji-li* is torn between her family loyalty, which means having a difficult life and being frowned upon by the Red Guard, and betraying her family and becoming an “educable child.” She is strongly encouraged several times to break family ties and to put the needs of the Cultural Revolution before the needs of the family or herself.

Resolution—The conflict is resolved when *Ji-li* decides to remain loyal to her family even when she realizes that she should turn on her grandmother because she was a landlord’s wife.

2. Type—Character/Nature

Character involved—*Ji-li*’s father

Cause—*Ji-li*’s father is unprepared to work in the cold for so long. He was detained one evening from work in the theater and did not have the opportunity to wear heavier clothes.

Resolution—*Ji-li* brings her father a heavy sweater that she knitted for him. She hopes that the Red Guard will let him wear this new, heavier sweater.

3. Type—Character/Character

Characters involved—*Ji-li*, her father, and, indirectly, her grandfather

Cause—*Ji-li* wants to audition for a prestigious dance training class; her father refuses to allow her to do so because the family has negative political connections. Her grandfather was a landlord, and her father is accused of being a “rightist.” Her audition would draw negative attention by the Red Guard.

Resolution—The conflict is resolved when *Ji-li*’s father writes a note to the school saying that his daughter will not audition. *Ji-li* is angry and embarrassed that she will not participate.

4. Type—Character/Fate

Character involved—*Ji-li*

Cause—*Ji-li* feels that all of the problems in her life stem from the fact that her grandfather was a landlord. Because of this, she is unable to audition for the

dance troupe. She is unable to become a Red Successor. Her family is terrorized by two searches in their apartment. Her father is detained and put to work. Her grandmother is frightened, and her mother becomes ill.

Resolution—Ji-li finally realizes that she must be grateful for the family she has and that she cannot allow her grandfather's actions to influence her life. Although she is still unhappy about her situation, she makes peace with the fact that it cannot be changed.

5. Type—Character/Society

Characters involved—Ji-li and her family, the Red Guard, and, indirectly, Chairman Mao

Cause—Ji-li's family are the victims of a search in which the Red Guard seeks to destroy any item that is considered "Four Olds." Because her family has been targeted as "troublemakers" who do not support Chairman Mao, their items are discarded. The family fights against societal expectations of supporting Chairman Mao without question.

Resolution—The conflict simply ends as the contents of the home are destroyed. It is the family's responsibility to clean up the mess and try to move on. Once the search concludes, Ji-li realizes that it was not as bad as she previously dreaded.

3. Ask students to review the five scenarios in **Handout 11** and to imagine alternative what-if situations. Direct them to write paragraphs in which they imagine the changes that would result if the characters made different choices. When students have finished writing, conduct a discussion based on their responses.
4. Assign students to finish reading *Red Scarf Girl*.

Optional Activities

1. Collaborate to create a newspaper in which each group member writes an article dealing with one conflict within the text. Write the cause of the conflict, the characters involved, and how the problem is resolved. Newspaper articles may be illustrated.
2. Research the life of Ji-li Jiang via the Internet, and write a report on other conflicts or aspects of her life not included in the novel.

Understanding Conflict

Part A.

Directions: Read descriptions of the types of conflicts.

Type	Definition	Example
Character/Character	Characters oppose each other.	You and your parents argue about your curfew.
Character/Self	Character has an internal struggle.	You are unsure of whether to tell on a friend making a bad decision.
Character/Nature	Character has trouble with the weather or environment.	You are stranded in the desert without enough water to survive.
Character/Society	Character holds beliefs against others/tradition/government.	You are angry that the driving age may be raised, and you plan to protest.
Character/Fate	Character lacks control of life.	You are upset about your father being transferred and having to move to a different state.

Part B.

Directions: Create your own example for each type of conflict. Be prepared to dramatize one of your conflicts. You may enlist help from a classmate.

1. Character/Character

2. Character/Self

3. Character/Nature

4. Character/Society

5. Character/Fate

Conflicts within *Red Scarf Girl*

Directions: Read the following scenarios. For each, identify the type of conflict and the characters involved. Decide what causes the conflict, and explain the way the character(s) resolve it.

1. One of the Red Guard where Ji-li's father is detained suggests that she can have a clean slate as one of Chairman Mao's "children" if she makes a break with her family. She even considers changing her last name, so she would no longer be associated with her grandfather.
2. Ji-li mentions how cold the weather has turned and how strong wind gusts blow against her as she walks outside. Even more than herself, she is worried about her father after he is detained. She observes him wearing only an old jacket that could not keep him warm.
3. Ji-li and her father get into a disagreement about her audition for the dance training class. She does not understand the political connections that her father tells her would negatively influence her audition and draw attention to her family. She is angry with her father.
4. Ji-li is angry that, because her grandfather was a landlord, she cannot be part of the Red Successors. She does not understand why his choices have to interfere with her life. She does not think that she should be punished for something that occurred long before she was born.
5. Ji-li's family is upset when the Red Guard enters their home to search it. Prior to this, her family took steps to preserve items considered part of the "Four Olds." For example, the beautiful red trunks were painted black and old garments were cut into bedspreads, sheets, and even mops. They hoped to hide these now disguised items from the government's army.