Title: *Charles*

Suggested Time: 6-8 days (45 minutes/day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.6, RL.7.10, W.7.2, W.7.4, W.7.9; SL.7.1; L.7.1, L.7.2

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Children use many tactics, both honest and dishonest, while discovering their identities.

Synopsis

As the narrator sends her son Laurie off to kindergarten, she fears that her sweet child has become a “swaggering character.” Every day Laurie regales the family with stories about the misdeeds of his classmate Charles and the punishments he receives (which seem to embolden rather that subdue him). Laurie speculates that Charles may be thrown out of school. In the third and fourth weeks, Charles reforms, but he breaks out again with “evil word” mischief. While Laurie’s parents worry that Charles is having a bad influence on their son, they grow increasingly curious about him. At the PTA, Laurie’s mother discovers from Laurie’s teacher that there is no one named Charles in the class. The story raises many questions for students: why Laurie lies, why “Charles” acts out, and what role the narrator-mom plays in the events and in readers’ perception of them.

2. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.

3. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently.

2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.

3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text Dependent Questions** | **Answers** |
| What changes does Laurie’s mother observe in her son the day he starts kindergarten? Cite textual evidence to support your answer. | Laurie’s mother observes that he is becoming more independent, and perhaps a bit rude. For example, “…he renounced corduroy overalls…,” he was a “long-trousered, swaggering character who forgot to stop at the corner and wave goodbye…,”and “He came home the same way, the front door slamming open…his voice became raucous…,” and “…he spoke insolently to his father…” |
| What is Laurie’s response when asked, “Why did Charles hit the teacher?” | “Because she tried to make him color with red crayons.” “He wanted to color with green crayons so he hit the teacher…” |
| What was Laurie most focused on discussing with his parents when they asked him, “How was school today?” Cite evidence to support your answer. | Laurie was most focused on discussing Charles’s behavior. For example, he said, “The teacher spanked a boy, though,...”, “…for being fresh…””He was fresh. The teacher spanked him and made him stand in a corner. He was awfully fresh.” |
| Find evidence that Laurie enjoys discussing Charles’s bad behavior. | Laurie “grinned enormously and said, ‘Today Charles hit the teacher.’” |
| What other behaviors did Charles exhibit on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday? | Wednesday—“…he bounced a seesaw onto the head of a little girl and made her bleed...”  Thursday—“…he kept pounding his feet on the floor.”  Friday—“…he threw chalk.” |
| Describe Laurie’s mother’s feelings about his first week in kindergarten. What does she say to let you know she feels this way? | Laurie’s mother is concerned about how Laurie is reacting to all the negative influences at school. I know this because she says to her husband, “Do you think kindergarten is too unsettling for Laurie? All this toughness and bad grammar, and this Charles boy sounds like such a bad influence.” |
| How does Laurie’s father respond to his mother? What does this response tell the readers about Laurie’s father’s feelings? | He says to his wife, “It’ll be all right…Bound to be people like Charles in the world. Might as well meet them now as later.” Laurie’s father is somewhat less concerned than his mother about the negative influences. |
| How do you know that discussing Charles’ behavior on Monday with his parents is important to Laurie? | The readers know that Laurie is excited to share with his parents because Laurie is shouting even as he comes up the hill-- “Charles,” Laurie yelled all the way up the hill, “Charles was bad again.” |
| How does Laurie describe Charles? What does this physical description tell you about Laurie’s perception of Charles? | ‘“He’s bigger than me,’ Laurie said. ‘And he doesn’t have any rubbers and he doesn’t even wear a jacket.” This physical description shows readers that Laurie sees Charles as a more independent child, one not made to wear the things his mother makes him wear. |
| Summarize the events on the day the teacher’s friend visits Laurie’s classroom. | The friend came to do exercises with the students. Charles was removed from the exercises when he kicked the friend, and he was fresh to the friend. |
| Charles has become an almost legendary figure for the family. Cite proof of this. | “…the baby was being a Charles when she cried all afternoon; Laurie did a Charles when he filled his wagon full of mud and pulled it through the kitchen; even my husband, when he caught his elbow in the telephone cord and pulled telephone, ash tray, and a bowl of flowers off the table, said, after the first minute, ‘Looks like Charles.’” |
| What piece of dialogue best explains what *reformation* means? Explain why this text helps the reader understand the meaning of the word. | “Charles was so good today the teacher gave him an apple.” Charles’ behavior to this point has been mostly negative behavior; his receipt of a reward shows a change in behavior, and reformation means change. |
| By the third week of school, Charles is showing evidence of a reformation. Cite examples from that support the idea that Charles has undergone this reformation. | Throughout the story, Charles has misbehaved. However, at this point in the story, Charles’s behavior at school has improved. By “Thursday of the third week,” he “was so good…the teacher gave him an apple” when “he gave the crayons around and he picked up the books afterward and the teacher said he was her helper.” |
| Does Laurie’s father believe that Charles’s reformation will last? How do you know what he believes? | No, he does not believe it because he says “cynically”, “Wait and see…When you’ve got a Charles to deal with, this may mean he’s only plotting.” |
| Were Laurie’s father’s reservations about Charles’s reformation correct? How do you know? | Yes. On Friday, Laurie reports, “You know what Charles did today?...He told a little girl to say a word and she said it and the teacher washed her mouth out with soap and Charles laughed.” |
| What is Laurie’s mother’s purpose for wanting to attend the PTA meeting? | She wants to meet Charles’s mother. “My husband came to the door with me that evening as I set out for the PTA meeting. ‘Invite her over for a cup of tea after the meeting,’ he said. ‘I want to get a look at her.’ ‘If only she’s there,’ I said prayerfully. |
| What are Laurie’s mother’s expectations of Charles’s mother? Cite evidence to support your conclusion. | Laurie’s mom expects Charles’ mom to be worn out and exhausted, ready to apologize for her son. Readers know this because the text says this—“At the meeting I sat restlessly, scanning each comfortable matronly face, trying to determine which one hid the secret of Charles. None of them looked to me haggard enough. No one stood up in the meeting and apologized for the way her son had been acting. No one mentioned Charles.” |
| According to the teacher, how is Laurie doing in kindergarten? | “’We had a little trouble adjusting, the first week or so,’ she said primly, ‘but now he’s a fine little helper. With lapses, of course.”’ |
| What is Laurie’s mother’s response? How does this response reveal that Laurie’s mother does not immediately see the similarity between Laurie and Charles’ behavior pattern? | “Laurie usually adjusts very quickly,…I suppose this time it’s Charles’s influence.” Laurie’s mother is still blaming Charles for Laurie’s bad behavior. |
| What is the last sentence in the text? How does it reveal that Laurie has manipulated his parents? | “Charles?” she said. “We don’t have any Charles in the kindergarten.” The manipulation that is revealed is that Charles doesn’t exist. |
| If there isn’t “any Charles in the kindergarten", then who is he? | The reader can infer that Laurie invented Charles, an imaginary character, in order to be able to discuss at home his bad behavior at school. |

Tier II Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | renounced\*  raucous\*  insolently\*  warily\*  haggard\* | deprived  privileges  reassuringly  simultaneously  scornfully  grimly  reformation  cynically  plotting  abandoned  scanning  matronly  maneuvered |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | swaggering  elaborately  insanely  solemnly | vain  anxiously  passionately  heartily  institution  incredulously  awed  primly |

\*definitions given in text

Culminating Task

* Prompt

*How does Laurie convince his parents that “Charles” is a real student in his class? Write a well-developed essay in which you use strong and relevant textual evidence to support your explanation.*

* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially when this process is new and/or the text is challenging!

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “He came home the same way, the front door slamming open, his cap on the floor, and the voice suddenly become raucous shouting, ‘Isn’t anybody here?’  At lunch he spoke insolently to his father, spilled his baby sister’s milk…” | The fact that his mother, the narrator, details his behavior shows us that this negative behavior is unusual for Laurie. |
| “’The teacher spanked a boy, though,’ Laurie said, addressing his bread and butter. ‘For being fresh,’ he added with his mouth full.  ‘What did he do?’ I asked. ‘Who was it?’  Laurie thought. ‘It was Charles,’ he said. ‘He was fresh. The teacher spanked him and made him stand in a corner.’” | This is the first instance of Laurie sharing “Charles’s” behavior at school. The fact that he had to think about who misbehaved is a clue. |
| ‘”Charles yelled so in school they sent a boy in from first grade to tell the teacher she had to make Charles keep quiet, and so Charles had to stay after school. And so all the children stayed to watch him. ‘” | It should seem unusual to the audience that all the children would stay after school to witness “Charles’s” after-school detention. |
| “’Charles?’ she said. ‘We don’t have any Charles in the kindergarten.’” | Here the teacher reveals that Charles is fictitious. We can infer that “Charles” is Laurie. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

Have you ever heard the statement, as innocent as a child? In the story “Charles,” written by Shirley Jackson, the main character Laurie makes up a fictional student Charles to hide his own misbehavior, and his parents buy it hook, line, and sinker!

The narrator of the story, Laurie’s mom, lets the readers know Laurie is usually a good boy when she states in detail his unusual behavior, “He came home the same way, the front door slamming open, his cap on the floor, and the voice suddenly becoming raucous shouting, ‘Isn’t anybody here?’ At lunch he spoke insolently to his father, spilled his baby sister’s milk…” It was after this bout of ‘unusual’ behavior that the fictional kindergarten student “Charles” appeared.

Laurie’s mom was trying to divert the attention away from Laurie’s bad behavior when she asked him about his day. He told his parents, “’The teacher spanked a boy, though,’ Laurie said, addressing his bread and butter. ‘For being fresh,’ he added with his mouth full. ‘What did he do?’ I asked. ‘Who was it?’ Laurie thought. ‘It was Charles,’ he said. ‘He was fresh. The teacher spanked him and made him stand in a corner.’” The clue the narrator gave us in this discussion is that Laurie had to think a minute before he answered that it was Charles. This piece of text leads the reader to wonder why the parents weren’t suspicious about his tale at the time.

It is during the discussion on Monday with Laurie and his parents that the reader should be getting really suspicious of Laurie’s tales, even though the parents were still naively believing him. Laurie told his parents that Charles was yelling so much that they had to send a boy from first grade to tell the teacher to make Charles keep quiet. It was after this incident that the text stated, “…Charles had to stay after school, and so all the children stayed to watch him.”

The story concludes with the mom's visit to the school. Laurie's mom is eager to meet the parents of Charles. This fully reveals to the reader that Laurie’s parents were completely convinced that Charles was a real student in Laurie’s kindergarten class. The teacher told his mom, after being asked about Charles, “’Charles?’ she said. ‘We don’t have any Charles in the kindergarten.’” This shows that Laurie has created Charles.

Additional Tasks

* Create a multi-flow map detailing the causes and effects of Charles’s behavior during the first week of school, particularly Tuesday to Friday.

Sample Answer:

Charles’s Behavior Multi-Flow Map

Charles’s voice suddenly became raucous shouting.”

Charles is a “sweet-voiced nursery school tot.”

Charles gets spanked.

Charles hit the teacher.

Charles begins school.

Charles stays inside during recess.

Charles “bounced a seesaw onto the head of a little girl.”

*\*\*\*More behavior-consequences partners could be added.*

* Create a multi-flow map detailing how Laurie’s mom changes the subject each time Laurie misbehaves in front of his father.

Sample Answer:

Laurie’s Mom’s Multi Flow Map

“Look down,” Laurie said. “Look at my thumb. Gee, you’re dumb.” He began to laugh insanely.

“Why did Charles hit the teacher?” I asked quickly.

“How *was* school today?” I asked, elaborately casual.

Laurie’s mom changes the subject.

At lunch he spoke insolently to his father.

“Anything,” I said. “Didn’t learn anything.

“Did you learn anything?” his father asked.

Laurie regarded his father coldly. “I didn’t learn nothing,” he said.

* Work with your assigned partner to write a brief dialogue that takes place between Laurie and his mother after she returns from the PTA meeting. What is likely to be said between Laurie and his mother? Be prepared to present your work.

Your dialogue should include the proper use of quotation marks and any other needed punctuation. It should also include *at least* three lines of dialogue between the two characters.

Example: “Charles, where are you?” I yelled out when I entered the house. “I’m in the kitchen fixing you a snack,” said Charles in a sweet voice.

Note to Teacher

* Many of the vocabulary words are adverbs, ending with –ly. Consider teaching a mini-lesson on the use of adverbs in the text and the word families of which they are a part.
* For the third additional task, a brief dialogue, students should be paired to write a brief dialogue between Laurie and his mother after she returns from the PTA meeting. To get students started, divide the class in half. Assign half the students to be Lauries and half to be Moms. Then, pair the “Lauries” with the “Moms” and have them create a dialogue, writing down the lines they like best to share with the class.

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**“Charles”**

1. What changes does Laurie’s mother observe in her son the day he starts kindergarten? Cite textual evidence to support your answer.
2. What is Laurie’s response when asked, “Why did Charles hit the teacher?”
3. What was Laurie most focused on discussing with his parents when they asked him, “How was school today?” Cite evidence to support your answer.
4. Find evidence that Laurie enjoys discussing Charles’s bad behavior.
5. What other behaviors did Charles exhibit on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday?
6. Describe Laurie’s mother’s feelings about his first week in kindergarten. What does she say to let you know she feels this way?
7. How does Laurie’s father respond to his mother? What does this response tell the readers about Laurie’s father’s feelings?
8. How do you know that discussing Charles’ behavior on Monday with his parents is important to Laurie?
9. How does Laurie describe Charles? What does this physical description tell you about Laurie’s perception of Charles?
10. Summarize the events on the day the teacher’s friend visits Laurie’s classroom.
11. Charles has become an almost legendary figure for the family. Cite proof of this.
12. What piece of dialogue best explains what *reformation* means? Explain why this text helps the reader understand the meaning of the word.
13. By the third week of school, Charles is showing evidence of a reformation. Cite examples that support the idea that Charles has undergone this reformation.
14. Does Laurie’s father believe that Charles’s reformation will last? How do you know what he believes?
15. Were Laurie’s father’s reservations about Charles’s reformation correct? How do you know?
16. What is Laurie’s mother’s purpose for wanting to attend the PTA meeting?
17. What are Laurie’s mother’s expectations of Charles’s mother? Cite evidence to support your conclusion.
18. According to the teacher, how is Laurie doing in kindergarten?
19. What is Laurie’s mother’s response? How does this response reveal that Laurie’s mother does not immediately see the similarity between Laurie and Charles’ behavior pattern?
20. What is the last sentence in the text? How does it reveal that Laurie has manipulated his parents?
21. If there isn’t “any Charles in the kindergarten", then who is he?