

## **Viewing Guide for *Exploring Character Complexity with Catcher in the Rye* Video Clip**

*Summary:* In this video clip, a high school humanities teacher and her ninth grade students explore the complexities of fictional characters. The teacher initially explains that, like real people, characters in a novel have multi-layered personalities. Through the use of a continuum displaying opposing character traits, small groups of students graphically illustrate where Holden Caulfield, the main character in Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*, falls on a given continuum. They then support their opinions with textual evidence. After this exercise, students select other conflicting character traits that might describe Holden and create a new continuum for each trait; again, they support their choices with textual evidence. Finally, students and teacher engage in a whole-group discussion that synthesizes and expands their thinking about Holden Caulfield.

### *Initial Viewing Focus Questions:*

- How does this lesson deepen understanding of the main character, and of human behavior in general?
- How does this lesson draw students back into the text?
- What “best practices” do you observe?

### *Segment 1: Setting the Stage: Evaluating Character Complexity*

- The teacher reviews the significance of Holden’s name and asks students to support their thinking about this with textual evidence. What is the teacher’s purpose in posing these questions?
- The teacher draws a comparison between the complexity of human beings and the main character of this novel. How might the analogy she uses—that of a layer cake—help students better understand her point?
- The teacher reviews the purpose of the previous night’s homework assignment. Small groups of students are asked to discuss the character trait continuum sheet and provide evidence to support their thinking. How does the practice of returning to the text to provide evidence strengthen and expand thinking about a topic?

### *Segment 2: Small-Group Discussions*

- The teacher circulates among the groups, questioning, clarifying, and validating student opinions. How does her questioning help her assess her students' understanding of the novel and of the continuum activity?
- The teacher continues to confer with various groups. How does she challenge and extend the thinking of her students? How might she provide support for groups who are struggling? What do you observe about the level of understanding of these students, based on their conversations?

### *Segment 3: Wrap-Up and Student Presentations*

- The teacher pulls the class back together to synthesize the students' thinking about the main character. Why is this shift to a whole-group discussion an effective conclusion to this lesson?

### *Reflection:*

- How has this teacher ensured that several of the language arts content standards have been incorporated within this lesson?
- What was the teacher's role in each segment of the video clip?
- How is individual accountability provided for within the context of the small-group segment of this lesson?
- What best practices did you observe?