ANIMAL CHARACTER DESIGN

AGES

Teens

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Host a writing workshop in which teens create unique animal characters! Begin with a group discussion of teens' favorite characters and their traits. Printable worksheets guide teens on both written and visual character design. Optionally, have teens do a bit of research into real animals on which to base their characters (i.e., behavior, habitat, physiology). Suggested runtime: 90–120 minutes

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

You will need:

- Papers/notebooks
- Pencils and other drawing supplies
- Whiteboard/poster board/presentation paper
- Character worksheets (see Printables)
- Laptop and AV equipment (optional)

After discussion, pass out character sheets and give teens 30–60 minutes to work on character design. Make it optional for teen writers to share their characters with the group.

UNIQUE SPACE AND PERSONNEL NEEDS

For large groups, have extra volunteers on hand to prompt those who get stuck.

You might also partner with local writers, cartoonists, or publishers to come talk about character design.

RESOURCES

Drawing Nonfiction

The Art of Animal Character Design, 2nd ed. (2014) by David Colman (teens/adults)

The Cartoonist's Big Book of Drawing Animals (2008) by Christopher Hart (or any cartooning book by Christopher Hart) (middle grade)

Principles of Creature Design: Creating Imaginary Animals (2015) by Terryl Whitlatch (teens/adults)

TIP:

Remind teens that the worksheets are just to get them started. They can ignore what they do not like and expand upon their own ideas instead. Be sure to have extra paper on hand.

TIP:

Consider making this a two-part program. In the second part, teens begin outlining, writing, or drawing stories based on their animal characters. Or combine with Chapter 06: Animal Zines; after the program, they can photocopy their zines to share with each other.

ADAPTATION FOR CHILDREN:

Shorten the time and discuss Disney characters from movies such as *Zootopia* or *The Lion King*. How do these characters act like real animals? Develop a new character and/or story as a group activity.

GAME/ACTIVITY

YA Fiction with Animal Protagonists

The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents (2002) by Terry Pratchett

Blanca and Roja (2018) by Anna-Marie McLemore

Nekogahara by Hiroyuki Takei (Vols. 1–5)

Tailchaser's Song (2000 [1985]) by Tad Williams

The Warriors (Warriors: The Prophcy Begins #1) (2003) by Erin Hunter and Dave Stevenson

The Wildings (2012) by Nilanjana Roy and Prabha Mallya

What Curiosity Kills (2010) by Helen Ellis

TIP:

For YA nonfiction on drawing manga, see Chapter 01: Animal Anime and Manga.

TIP:

See also Chapter 01: Animal Anime and Manga for resources on manga character design.

GAME/ACTIVITY

PRINTABLE

ANIMAL CHARACTER DESIGN: WRITE

BASICS

Name/age:

_____

Species:

_____

Home/habitat:

_____

PERSONALITY II

Sense of humor: none ☐ goofy ☐ sarcastic ☐

Hobbies/skills:

_____

Strengths:

_____

Weaknesses:

_____

SOCIAL

Family:

_____

Friends:

_____

Enemies:

_____

Daily routine:

_____

APPEARANCE

Health:

_____

Body type:

_____

Clothing and/or grooming style:

_____

Unique traits:

_____

PERSONALITY I

Introvert ☐ or extrovert? ☐

Optimist ☐ or pessimist? ☐

Loud ☐ or quiet? ☐

Pet peeve:

_____

Something they often say:
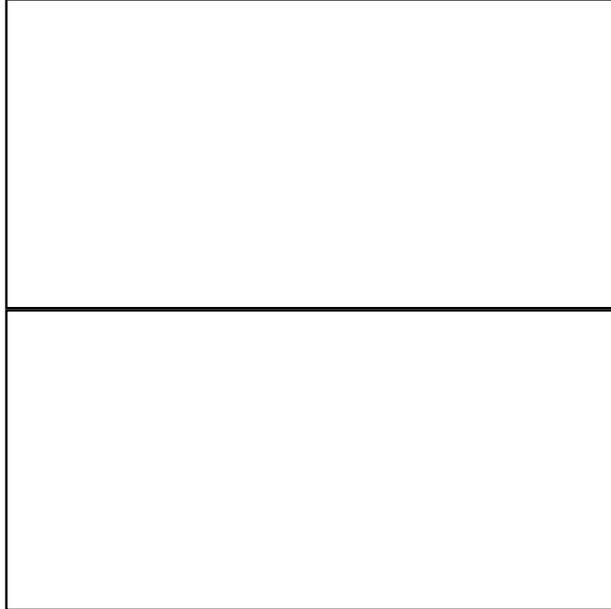
_____

OTHER

_____

_____

_____

_____

Tip: What does your character want or need? What is preventing them from getting what they want or need? Try writing your story around this central conflict!

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ANIMAL CHARACTER DESIGN: DRAW
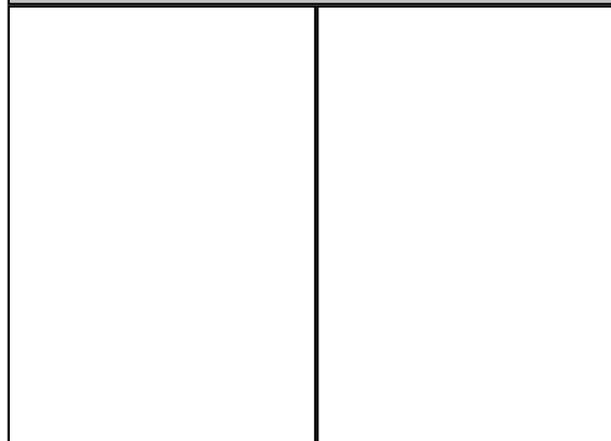
FULL BODY SKETCH

HOME: EXTERIOR & INTERIOR

DOING FAVORITE ACTIVITY

ZOOM: CLAW & TAIL

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

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