



Muse Machine 2024 Summer Institute-Inspired Lesson Plan

## **Funky Album Covers: Exploring Identity in *Starfish***

Developed by Cherie Frantz

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Dayton, OH

### **Lesson Plan Summary:**

From Muse Machine's 2024 Summer Institute *Get in the Groove! Foundations for a Funky Classroom*, middle school ELA teacher Cherie Frantz used her experience of creating a funk album cover to inspire her students to do the same, only with the purpose of analyzing characters and character traits from their class novel. In this lesson, students learn how the process of creating artwork enhances one's ability to better understand a fictional character. This lesson begins with a review of character traits which leads to students realizing that a person - or character - does not have all good or all bad traits. Because the album cover is limited in space, this process requires students to analyze characters more deeply to determine which traits really define the character. Thus, this lesson combines essential ELA standards with valuable lifelong skills and meaning.

**Instructor:** Cherie Frantz, Northmont Middle School

**Title of Lesson:** Funky Album Covers: Exploring Identity in *Starfish*

**Date of Implementation:** November 2024

**Subject Area & Grade Level:** ELA 7th Grade

**Summer Institute Inspiration:** The “funky fundamentals,” album cover art-making activity

## LESSON OVERVIEW

### **Summary:**

This lesson reinforces students’ skills in character analysis through the application of “the funky fundamentals”: groove, imagination, identity, and futurism. Students previously read the novel *Starfish* by Lisa Fipps. Students will now demonstrate their understanding of a character’s background, challenges, and growth throughout the story by creating an album cover for their chosen character and writing an explanation of how their chosen imagery supports their character analysis.

### **Standards:**

**RL 7.1** Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text

**RL. 7.3** Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

**RL.7.6** Analyze how an author uses the point of view to develop and contrast the perspectives of different characters or narrators in a text.

**W.7.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

### **Objectives & Outcomes:**

#### **Objectives**

Students will:

- Learn four key elements of funk music—groove, imagination, identity, and futurism—and how they can be used to analyze a fictional character.
- Apply elements of design such as color, shape, and imagery to create a compelling album cover representative of a character.
- Describe their interpretation of a character through writing, art, and design.

#### **Outcomes**

Students can:

- Gain a deeper understanding of a fictional character’s background, challenges, and growth through the story.

- Understand how elements of design can work together to form an interpretation of a character’s feelings and mood.
- Describe and defend their artistic and interpretive choices.
- Develop empathy for peers and people unlike them by closely studying a fictional character.

### ***Teaching Approaches:***

Lecture, small group/individual

### ***Assessment Tools:***

Teacher observation, rubric

## **LESSON PREPARATION**

### ***Teacher Needs:***

#### **Teacher Context & Research**

- Watch “[Funk: The Sound of Dayton](#),” a student documentary from the University of Dayton, to learn more about the genesis of Dayton’s unique funk sound and cultural impact. One major takeaway is that the genre was developed by young people who were forming their own unique musical identities.
- Watch “[How the Arts and the Funk Music Influenced My Life](#).”
- Given that the Funky Fundamentals – groove, imagination, identity, and futurism – have parallels in the themes of adolescent literature, identify how they connect to character development in the class novel *Starfish* and how they can be used to analyze characters and character traits.

#### **Helpful Hints**

1. Use the funk songs in the slide presentation or the Muse Institute mixtape to help students get in the groove. Play it at various times in class.
2. Encourage students to be creative!
3. Students may think that character traits are solely negative or positive, rather than a mix of both. Discuss this as you model brainstorming character traits on the first day.

### ***Student Needs:***

#### **Prior Knowledge**

Students read *Starfish* and gained knowledge about the many characters in the novel. We also discussed bullying and how it affects various people.

## Student Voice

Students chose the character they want to highlight on their album. They also chose how to represent the groove, imagination, identity, and futurism of the character on the album cover, the design, the colors, etc.

## Vocabulary

- *Groove*: The rhythm and flow of the music
- *Imagination*: Creativity and innovation in expression
- *Identity*: Personal representation and storytelling through art
- *Futurism*: Looking forward and envisioning possibilities
- *Symbolism*: The use of an object to represent a complex or abstract idea
- *Imagery*: Vivid, descriptive language that appeals to the five senses

# EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES

Students will be assessed on their contribution to the discussions of characters, their finished album cover, and their written reflection.

# ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

We can gain empathy for people by learning what makes them feel creative, which activities and experiences form their core identities, and what hopes and dreams they hold for the future.

Writing and art can be combined to creatively interpret fictional text.

# LEARNING PLAN

## Essential Questions

How can the fundamentals of funk be used to examine character traits?

How can we really get to know a character in a novel?

## Resources

- *Starfish* by Lisa Fipps
- Laptop with internet access
- [Google Slides](#) (includes funk song links and album examples)
- [Muse Summer Institute Classroom-Ready Funk Mixtape](#)
- Paper
- Coloring supplies
- [Project Rubric](#)

## **Hook**

Students will walk into class with funk music playing in the background. Ask students probing questions, such as “How does this music make you feel?” and “What emotion do you think this person is feeling?”

## **Main Lesson Narrative/Sequence**

### *Day 1*

(Slide 1) Read the first slide about funk music in Dayton. Click the link to watch the first five minutes of “Funk: The Sound of Dayton” University of Dayton student documentary.

(Slides 2-7) Listen to a few funk songs. Introduce the Four Fundamentals of Funk: Groove, Imagination, Identity and Futurism.

(Slide 8) Provide examples of character traits and discuss them as a class. Discuss how these relate to the protagonist, Ellie, and collaboratively brainstorm potential traits, colors, and images that could represent her. Use the funky fundamentals as a tool to brainstorm and as a way of categorizing. (Note: Students may think that character traits are solely negative or positive, rather than a mix of both.)

Ask guiding questions: "What does this character struggle with?" "How does this character change throughout the story?"

(Slide 9) In table groups, students go through other characters in the novel and discuss how the fundamentals of funk fit in with the characters.

### *Day 2*

(Slides 10-13) Students listen to funk music as they look at images of album covers. As a class, discuss what they see and how bands/singers are represented. What makes it memorable? Explain the elements of an album cover: title, artist name, imagery, and symbolism.

(Slides 14-16) Introduce the album cover assignment. Students each choose one character from the novel. Discuss how to choose colors and images that reflect character traits.

Their artwork should include the character's name, a title, and at least three images or colors that represent key traits. Students will write a short paragraph explaining their choices and how they relate the character's traits to the four fundamentals of funk.

If students finish early, they should come up with song titles to add to their album.

## **Demonstration of Learning**

Students will share their album covers with their table groups and discuss the character traits they chose to represent. Several students will choose to share their albums with the whole class.

## Final Review

The teacher will know from observing the students' class discussions, completed album covers, and written explanations whether students achieved the desired outcomes as described in the project rubric. Students will be evaluated on their overall creativity; accurate connections to their character; use of funk fundamentals to dig deeper into their character; artistic technique; and ability to write a clear, insightful, and well-articulated explanation.

# LESSON REFLECTION

## Teacher

Students were more excited about the project than I anticipated. I tried this lesson with all five of my classes, including my two inclusion classes.

I was surprised by some of the students' responses to music. I had several students dancing, creating beats on the desk, tapping feet or swaying and others that just sat there. Many students didn't know funk originated in Dayton, Ohio. A few of them did and a few of the students said they had heard some of the songs before because of their parents.

My students were very creative with their albums. Some thought about characters differently than expected. Others didn't dig very deep into their character and gave surface level details. I am looking at teaching *Starfish* a little differently next year. I need to have students spend more time on the supporting characters. They could not expand on other characters' traits in as much detail as the protagonist of the story.

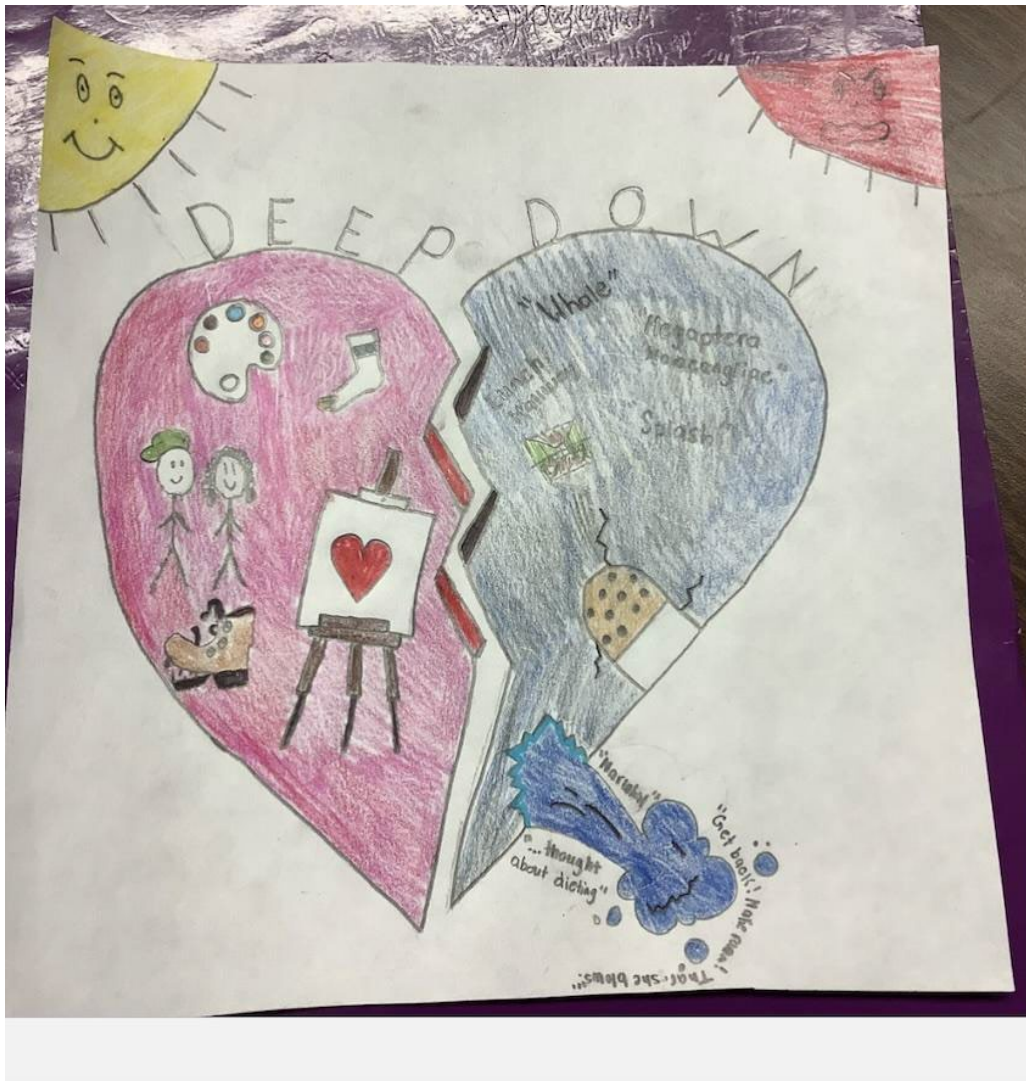
## Students (examples)

- What I learned while working on making an album cover was two main things. One, everyone has their own ideas of what and how to make their own, especially if most people have the same character. Another thing that I learned is really learning the character more and how we get to see that in real life with their favorite hobbies and their personality. This is my personal opinion, but you did a great job with this idea of making an album cover based off a book. It was really fun.- 2
- I felt a bit nervous about it, but I think it's good to incorporate creativity outside of writing into subjects.
- I liked how we got to think about how we wanted our album covers to look.

Student Artifact #1

## Deep Down

I chose Deep Down because on the outside Enemy Number 3 seems like a bully but deep down he's just going through a hard time. Enemy Number 3 grove is art class. This is because he is a really good artist and most likely enjoys art class. His imagination comes from his artistic abilities. His artwork expresses how he feels deep down. Enemy Number 3 identity is being an artist. Also learning that he can defend himself without hurting others in the making. His futurism is being a professional artist. Also, gaining lots of new friends including Ellie.



**Student Artifact #2**

I named it, "The Helping Call" because it represents Dr. Woods by her getting a call for help since she is a therapist. The Groove for Dr. Woods is bringing in her dog during the session and bringing in lightsabers, also making assignments to help Ellie get better at defending instead of attacking but also having Ellie tell her mom when she says something that is mean to her. The imagination for Dr. Woods is her critical thinking and making scenarios to explain things to Ellie and also her using lightsabers to teach Ellie to defend herself and not attack. The Identity of Dr. Woods is showing professionalism because when Ellie sits in Dr. Woods chair Dr. Woods doesn't let it bother her and just sits on the couch instead. The futurism for Dr. Woods may be Ellie and Dr. Woods don't have anymore appointments because things have got resolved and Ellie has learned everything she needs to know.



**Student Artifact #3**



The title of my Album is called Creativity Land. I chose Creativity Land because she's creative. Catalina's groove is playing the guitar. She likes to play the guitar. Catalina's Imagination is always happy. Because she's always happy around people and a very energy person. Her Identity is Mexican. Because that is her culture. Her Futurism is Vivi, Ellie, and her are friends forever. They always stand up for each other and help each other also when someone is bullying one of them they are always

