

## Semantic Feature Analysis

### Purpose:

This strategy is used to teach students about organizing things and ideas into categories, helping them learn about the rules involved in categorization and consider similarities and differences between categories.

### Description:

This strategy is to be used shortly after the novel has been completed, when the students have read everything about the novel's characters. The semantic feature analysis is a strategy that, when correctly used, helps students compare and contrast characteristics. This allows them to better consider how these words are related to one another, and how they are different. Moving slowly from more concrete characteristics to more abstract ones will help students ease into working with more abstract concepts.

### Directions:

#### Step One: List Words

As countless categories can work for this strategy, this can be a great opportunity to help students also consider how the characters in the novel are characterized. Ask students to name some of the more important characters in the book (Hannah, her grandfather, Shmuel, etc.). Write these names on the horizontal lines to the left of the table. Try to steer students toward more complex characters, or characters about whom more information is known.

#### Step Two: List Features

Briefly discuss characterization, specifically asking students to identify the term "character trait." What do character traits tell us? How do we find them? Are they stated explicitly in the text, or do we have to use the author's clues to figure them out for ourselves? After students seem to have a good grasp on what a character trait is, help them list traits that they think the characters they have listed may or may not have. Begin suggesting traits that are more concrete (Jewish, young, etc.), allowing students to make suggestions as well. Slowly start suggesting traits that are more abstract and complex (heroic, devoted, etc.). List these features along the vertical lines at the top of the grid, and start with just a few, while the students get used to the strategy. Continue to add more as later discussion brings up new ideas.

#### Step Three: Indicate Feature Possession:

Guide the students through the characters and characteristics, determining whether or not each character has each characteristic (or if it is unknown or ambiguous). If they have the trait, indicate so with a "+" in the corresponding box, if not, put a "-". If you do not have enough information, put a "?" and if the response is a "yes and no" type of ambiguity, indicate so with a "+/-".

#### Step Four: Discuss

Discuss the concepts that come up as students try to decide and argue about who has which traits. Again, continue adding to the list of features as the discussion brings new ideas.

#### Step Five: Complete and Explore

Students can now practice completing this matrix using new words and features.

#### Assessment:

As this strategy helps students consider more complex issues involving characterization, their understanding can be checked with an assignment asking them to use their matrix chart and ideas from the discussion to complete a writing assignment explaining a character's character traits, how the author has characterized this character, etc. This could prepare the students to write a paper on one character from the novel, in which they would demonstrate a knowledge how the author indicates the traits of her characters (i.e. through patterns in behavior, through explicitly stating, through what the character says in dialogue, etc.). Or, students could write about a given characteristic, using characters from the novel as examples of how this characteristic is or is not manifested. The assessment should show that students have improved how they think about both characters and traits, and that they are able to approach a text with the skills necessary to think more analytically.



