Changes and Choices in *The Calligrapher’s Daughter*

**Concept:** Character Development  
**Primary Subject Area:** English  
**Secondary Subject Areas:** N/A  
**Common Core Standards Addressed:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Standards for Literature, 9-12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades 9-10</strong></td>
<td><strong>Grades 11-12</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
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<td>2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.</td>
<td>3. Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g. where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).</td>
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<td>3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g. those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.</td>
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<td><strong>Craft and Structure</strong></td>
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<td>5. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g. parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g. pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.</td>
<td>5. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g. the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.</td>
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<td><strong>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</strong></td>
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<td>9. Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g. how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).</td>
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Overview:

*The Calligrapher’s Daughter* takes place over a period of thirty years, allowing the reader to follow Najin Han through a large portion of her life. This class will consider the key moments in her life—and in the world around her. As a class we will explore the impact this series of unexpected changes makes on Najin as a character. We will also analyze the choices she is forced to make as a result of the historical events unfolding around her—and we will discuss what these actions reveal about her character. At the end of this lesson students will have a stronger understanding of how characterization operates in a fictional text.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify key moments and turning points in *The Calligraphers Daughter*.
- Explore the ways in which Najin changes as a result of these particular moments.
- Analyze the choices Najin is forced to make (or makes of her own volition) and determine how these choices drive the plot.
- Identify the various textual sources that contribute to establishing character.
- Map the relations between a character’s choices and their personality.

Lesson Plan:

**Warm-Up Activity:**

Create seven large posters (or chalk board drawings) each with a key event from the text written at the top. The events are as follows—in order:

1. Najin’s father, Han, attempts to arrange a marriage for her
2. Najin’s mother arranges for her daughter to go to Seoul
3. Najin begins her work at the palace (and) with Princess Deokhye
4. Najin works to earn money to get her degree
5. Najin attends a women’s college in Seoul
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6. Najin and Calvin meet and she gradually develops feelings for him

7. Najin and Calvin get married

Divide the students into seven groups and assign one poster/drawing to each group. Have the class work together to organize the events on the board in the correct order in chronological order. Once the class has sorted the events, have the students meet for 5 minutes in their groups to discuss their assigned event. At the end of 5 minutes, students should come up with 4-6 bullet points addressing the following questions:

- How does Najin react to this moment?
- What does this say about Najin as a character?
- How does this event deepen our understanding of who Najin is as a person?

Once all groups have come up with their answers, elect one representative from each group to write their bullet points on the poster/chalkboard. This activity will help guide the remainder of the lesson.

**Short Lecture & Partner Activities:**

Assign each group an excerpt from the text that corresponds to the life event they just discussed for the previous activity. (The excerpts can be found on the “Textual References” pages of this packet. These excerpts can also be photocopied and handed out to each group member, if you have the time and resources.)

Allow the students a few minutes to read the passage. Next, ask each group to answer the following questions. They can use the timeline on the board to help them complete this activity:

- Describe Najin before this event and after it. Did she change? If so, how? Be as specific as possible, using evidence from the text.
- Did Najin arrive at this point due to her own choices, or due to choices that were made for her? What difference does this make?
- If this event took place at a different time in Najin’s life, would she have made the same decision?

After 15 minutes, bring the class back together to discuss Najin’s choices and the impact her ever-changing worldview has on the events that occur in the novel.
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**Discussion Wrap-Up**

To conclude, bring your class back together as a group and, collectively, describe the ways in which Najin’s family members, friends, and others impact the choices she makes throughout the novel. Who, in her life, plays the largest role? The smallest?

If it is helpful you can relate the development of Najin as a character to your own students’ lives. Were there events in your students’ lives that impacted who they are now? Who is the person that has had the biggest impact on their character? These responses, of course, are completely voluntary, but might be useful in discussing the elements of characterization.
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**Analytical:**
It seems as though every time Najin Han is in a transitional moment, she finds herself on a train. What metaphorical role—and literal role—does the train play in the text? Give an explanation of this phenomenon in *The Calligrapher’s Daughter* using specific examples from the text. You might want to cite multiple passages to make your case. Remember, your explanation is your argument. Responses should fall between 600-700 words.

**Creative:**
Reflect on your past and the person that you are today. Name one decision that you made that impacted your life, and determined, in part who you are today? Next, identify one event in your life that you did not start, but nevertheless affected your character. This is a practice in characterization, using yourself and the protagonist. Expand on this concept in 500-600 words.
Questions for Discussion:

- Describe the relationship between Najin and her mother. What impact does this relationship have on her life?
- What role does Najin’s mother play in the choices Najin must make?
- How does Najin’s mother react to Najin’s choices? Does she react positively or negatively?
- Does Najin’s mother generally approve or disapprove of her daughter?
- Describe the relationship between Najin and her father. What impact does this relationship have on her life?
- What role does Najin’s father play in the choices Najin must make?
- How does he react to Najin’s choices? Does he generally approve or disapprove?
- How do Najin’s father’s reactions, opinions, and values differ from those of Najin’s mother? What does this say about their family dynamic?
- How does Najin’s culture impact the choices she makes? In your opinion, how much freedom is Najin allowed?
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Book: The Calligrapher’s Daughter  
Author: Eugenia Kim  
Grade Level: 9-12  
Lesson Type: Character Development

**Key Vocabulary:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chinsa</td>
<td>Certified scholar of Korean Confucian classics, similar to a doctor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheongsam</td>
<td>Chinese word for the traditional women’s silk dress with Mandarin collar and frog closures.</td>
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<td>Daewongun</td>
<td>Literally, “prince of the great court,” father of the monarch who acts as regent.</td>
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<td>Dongsaeng</td>
<td>Younger sibling. How a sibling addresses a younger sister or younger brother.</td>
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<td>Gayageum</td>
<td>Elongated zither—or harp—like stringed instrument, usually with twelve strings.</td>
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<td>Geulsae</td>
<td>Expression of agreement or wonder, similar to “really”</td>
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<td>Gisaeng</td>
<td>Courtesan, akin to the Japanese geisha.</td>
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<td>Gomo</td>
<td>Paternal aunt, versus imo, maternal aunt.</td>
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*A complete list of vocabulary appears in the back of the text.*
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Examples of Textual References:

#1 “The scholar-artist Han decided that Najin should be married. That would be his response to yesterday’s letter of inquiry from an old acquaintance as to the availability of his daughter. On this fine morning, he would write his consent...He wrote elegantly on sheaves of whitest paper, using Chinese to reflect the formal solemnity of his response, and quick brushstrokes to hint urgency. He thought that at age fourteen Najin was woman enough. She’d graduate from the girls’ school when the term ended in three months, and what better time than soon after that? A providential harvest moon wedding! And since such a decision was beyond his wife’s role, it mattered little that she would be opposed. The Kabo Reforms said women couldn’t be married until sixteen, men until twenty, but this unenforceable law was generally ignored.” (pp. 100-101)

#2 “I cried most of the way to Seoul, much to the distress of the handmaid and her husband, who were sent by Imo, my aunt, to chaperone me. I was upset to be leaving home, anxious about what lay ahead, and fearful of my father’s reaction to my mother’s deceit. Mother told me he wouldn’t call me home, since the invitation had come from the palace. It showed how carefully she had planned my escape from marriage, and how deeply she had betrayed my father. My tears were for her sacrifice of her principles of duty and honor to Father because of me. I was overwhelmed with new understanding of her love, only to be saddened at having to part from her.” (p. 112)

#3 “It was decided that I’d go to school six days of the week and attend to Princess Deokhye in the afternoons until an hour before sunset. Then Pang would come to escort me, or I’d walk home with Imo if she were there...In the beginning I was so self-conscious to be an overnight guest that I could barely sleep, but it wasn’t too long before the princess’s retinue referred to the room I slept in as mine. This was a relaxation in protocol that was just another wave in the ebbing tide of royal glory.” (pp. 125-126)

#4 “By the end of August, I had two jobs. The Gordons already employed a cook and an industrious housekeeper, so my responsibilities were simple: tidying the children’s rooms and tending the garden. As a second job in the late afternoon, I tutored the children in Japanese language and grammar. If she happened to be around, Miss Gordon sometimes took part in those lessons as we sat around the dining room table, casually joining the children to recite “this is a yellow pencil,” which provoked me to extreme
Two summers into my job, my savings for college were nearly met. On a humid evening I decided it was time to alert my mother, upon whom I relied to gain final permission from Father. If he said yes, I could enroll for the fall.” (pp. 158-159)

“When I think of how hard you have worked to achieve your dream, how diligently you pursued your education, my eyes overflow with joy, my heart cries with pride. To think that my only daughter has a degree in childhood education and nursing from the first women’s college in Korea! You are among the pioneers for women in this new age, blessed with opportunities you have managed to take advantage of, even when faced with many obstacles. To also learn that you were among the top ten in your class has given me new reason to say that my cup runneth over. I am proud of you beyond measure.” (pp. 169-170)

“You’re very kind. Like your note yesterday.” I looked directly at him, then blushed at my true forwardness and his warm smile in return…As we headed towards the rocky path, I stayed a respectful few steps behind him, but soon he stopped, removed his jacket, came back, took the picnic bundle, including the teakettle, and gave me his hat to carry. Flustered by all these activities in public, I hardly knew what was going on until I found him walking beside me up the mountain path. I covered my mouth in worried embarrassment. “Shouldn’t we—shouldn’t I—” (p. 217)

“I would be married today in Manchuria. Traditionally a bride would go to the groom’s house to marry, but there had been nothing traditional about our betrothal. Adding unconventionality to the wedding made little difference. The annual Far East Presbytery Conference, for which Calvin’s father was the chairman this year, was also scheduled for August 31, the only possible day we could marry due to complex arrangements for our American journey, and Reverend Cho had decided to integrate our wedding into the conference, gaining the benefit of an on-site photographer and a feast for numerous guests at little personal expense. Perhaps, had I not been busy with travel plans and the dizzying activities that consume any bride, I might have seen my future father-in-law’s decision as peculiar. But I was getting married and going to America!” (p. 240)
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FILL AT YOUR DISCRETION WITH RELEVANT CLASSWORK
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<th>Category of Resource</th>
<th>Description of Resource</th>
<th>Potential Educational Uses of Resource</th>
<th>Link to Resource</th>
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<tr>
<td>Web article</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>This website will provide educators and students another resource to explain “characterization” to their students. Provided in this article are nuanced definitions of characterization, with examples drawn from familiar literary texts.</td>
<td><a href="http://literarydevices.net/characterization/">http://literarydevices.net/characterization/</a></td>
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