

# A Group of Gifted Learners

Have you met them in your school or home?

We took \*twelve common characteristics of giftedness and brought them to life by creating children who illustrate the characteristics in context. These personas provide us with the opportunity to discuss real kids we know with similar mannerisms and habits in order to develop ideas on meeting their unique needs in the classroom. Although there are certainly many more than twelve ways of describing gifted learners, this group gives you a taste of what gifted kids may act and sound like in your classroom or home. So come along and meet our kids!



*Have you met Louis? He's the kid who understands complex ideas and objects at first glance, like the workings of a computer or a foreign language. He sees connections between ideas, like the math behind music, and explains abstract concepts with analogies or examples. He can picture fractional parts of things in his head, discuss the concept of black holes comfortably and tell you everything you never knew about time travel. Alternate realities? The meaning of life? Bring it on! Louis loves to gnaw on complex, abstract ideas!*

## Tips for working with Louis, the SUPER CONNECTOR:

- Provide him with avenues to move up to higher levels of thinking quickly because he'll master basic concepts at first glance. Be prepared: he may try to argue his way out of drill and practice type activities.
- Give him room to wonder – he's full of interesting questions! Provide him with appropriate tools like a notebook or post-it notes to record thoughts as they come.
- Keep an open mind – he's bound to pose unexpected questions or share “big” thoughts with you. Provide parameters for sharing – could he pose one far-flung query a day? Leave you one post-it per class? Swap a communication log with you?
- Consult with the building foreign language teacher to brainstorm language enrichment options.
- Invite him to research a topic of his interest related to the curriculum and create a presentation for the class (website, blog, voicethread...).
- Provide him with a variety of texts to read and learn from.
- Introduce him to strategy games like chess.
- Show him how to take his interests in how our world works and pull them into

fictional writing; how about science fiction?



Have you met Quinn? He sounds like an adult, but he's only eight! His daily vocabulary is full of words like discombobulated, ironic and hypothesis. He could beat you at a game of Scrabble or Boggle. His hand is often waving, ready to share his opinions with the group. He has a way with words, able to clearly explain his ideas to you. And when another student is confused by your directions, you turn to Quinn to clarify it for his classmate. Plus, he laughs when you make a pun in class.

#### **Tips for working with Quinn, THE EXPLAINER:**

- Give him opportunities to articulate his thinking both orally and in writing – he is probably stronger in one area than the other and it's good practice for him to find a balance between both forms of communication.
- Provide him with more sophisticated communication tools like advanced graphic organizers, more detailed assignment options and digital tools.
- Give him clear feedback if he starts to dominate all class discussions or group conversations; model proper listening and discussion skills.



Have you met Olive? She's got a knack for absorbing information the first time around. Classroom procedures? She knows them. Stories you read aloud? She can recite them. Facts and figures? She's filed them away. She has a memory like an elephant. She is ready for the second step almost before you've finished showing her step one. If she's absent, it only takes you five minutes to catch her up to the rest of the class and she's off and running. Reviewing for a test? Practicing a skill for the third or fourth time? Better give Olive something else to do because she's already got it.

#### **Tips for working with Olive, THE INSTANT INTUITOR:**

- Give her the freedom to move onto the next phase of learning while other kids review and practice.
- Provide her with opportunities to dig deeper into the skills or concepts you're teaching to feed her rapid learning pace. She could explore websites, read

books, check out videos or museums on-line and fill out an exit slip to share her learning.

- Establish appropriate ways for Olive to let you know she's got something down cold so she can move on.



Have you met Nelson? He's a sponge, soaking up every bit of information you provide, and then moving on to find more on his own. His insatiable curiosity means LOTS of questions – he is not satisfied with general ideas or quick answers. He really wants to know the who, what, when, where, why and how of things. He will ask you things you never even thought of yourself and pose questions you're sure nobody knows the answer to! He is eager to learn, perking up when you kick off a new unit of study. But he can be picky and may only devour knowledge of certain areas he's fascinated with. Get ready to find Nelson at your desk each day with a new fact or query because he is overflowing with wonder!

#### **Tips for working with Nelson, THE SPONGE:**

- Harness his excitement by encouraging him to pursue questions and ideas on his own to share with the class.
- Give him clear expectations about what level of knowledge you want him to demonstrate in class assignments, while also providing him with opportunities to stretch and explore in depth.
- Give him room to develop his own wonderings to drive his learning.
- Provide him with a forum for his questions – a journal, notebook or post-it note to share with you or a peer.



Have you met Pam? She is a voracious reader – you can hardly pry her out of her latest book. In preparation for winter break, she checked out at least two dozen books from the library, everything from Anne of Green Gables to arachnids. She gets along just fine with the other third graders, but she could talk your ear off about the history of blimps, her latest archeological dig or the batting average of every Red Sox player since 1980. Sometimes, her deep interests take over and it can be tough to refocus her on other areas of learning in the classroom. She can get so invested in creating a portfolio of watercolors about her favorite fossil that she ends up with enough for a full gallery exhibit!

### **Tips for working with Pam, THE BIBLIOPHILE:**

- Provide choice so Pam can apply new knowledge in the context of her areas of interest.
- Give Pam the chance to share her knowledge with peers and other authentic audiences.
- Take the time to ask Pam about her interests every now and then. Be prepared to switch gears as she picks up new passions on the go!
- Give Pam clear parameters so she knows when assignments are due and what products are expected. If she wants to go beyond these expectations, help her break her grand ideas into manageable steps or suggest she just pick one element to pursue.



Have you met Sean? He will lock right into an activity or task for extended periods of time, staying hyperfocused on a new book, a cool assignment or a fun project. When you read aloud a favorite book, he begs you to share one more chapter. He could build with Legos for hours, spend an entire day on a PowerPoint presentation about Acadia National Park or get lost in the world of origami. Sometimes, he gets so engrossed, that he looks up to see his whole class has left for lunch without him! Deadlines may pass while he's still working, completely enmeshed in the experience.

### **Tips for working with Sean, THE MARATHON FOCUSER:**

- Give him a choice of working spaces to take advantage of his long attention span.
- Discuss the need for time parameters and talk through scenarios in which project deadlines arrive while he is still knee deep in learning. How can he prevent the last minute scramble?
- Work out a signal system with Sean (like a shoulder tap or small token on his table), so he knows that he needs to find a stopping place in his work and prepare for a transition.



Have you met Sadie? She is a real go-getter. She is full of her own ideas, from a neighborhood babysitting business to an original composition she's written for the holiday concert. And she's not shy about getting things moving. When you assign a project, she's got a twist to propose. When you have a class discussion, she's got an opinion to share. She may be the leader of every group or be happy to be a one woman show. She takes pride in her individuality. Her desire to do things her own way may come across as rebellious, but her passion comes from the heart.

**Tips for working with Sadie, THE MAVERICK:**

- Make room for choice in class assignments and projects so Sadie can develop her own version or format.
- Provide clear expectations so Sadie knows how to suggest her own opinions and ideas.
- Keep an open mind about the different ways kids can demonstrate their learning.



Have you met Liam? He drinks up the sights, sounds, smells and textures around him. When you go out to the school garden, he points out plants that smell sweet, spicy, or grassy. He finds peace from the waterfall CD you play during quiet work time. He gets upset when someone throws away a plastic bottle instead of recycling it and asks you what happens to homeless kids in the winter cold. He is enthusiastic about collecting money for the Pennies for Peace campaign and gets his own copy of the book to keep at home. His sensitive nature may mean that he cries when the Velveteen Rabbit is thrown out in the story, gets upset when you share constructive criticism about his work, and is resistant to his friends' ways of playing games at recess if different from his own. Need a judge and jury for a play about the Three Little Bears? Liam's your man because he's all about being fair!

**Tips for working with Liam, THE SENSITIVE SOUL:**

- Weave a variety of experiences into the classroom to appeal to all of the senses.
- Engage the class in proactive discussions to solve problems on the playground or to brainstorm ways to help the environment. Class meetings are a wonderful forum for role-playing, too, so Liam can see that there are many ways to play a

game or see a situation.

- Have a discussion about feelings with Liam. Let him know that it's OK to show the way you feel, but that there are also outlets to relieve tension (like talking a walk down the hall, getting a drink, counting to ten...).



Have you met Haley? She expects 150% from herself all of the time. When you ask her to do her best, she takes it to heart. She puts in extra time to do things right, paying attention to detail and going that extra mile every time. She is an overachiever and she doesn't feel good about turning in work that is mediocre. In fact, she'd rather scratch it and start again to get it right. If she's working with a partner, she can be bossy and overbearing at times, a real taskmaster. She may take over the assignment to make sure it gets done properly or be critical of the work done by her partner. When she is overwhelmed by deadlines and assignments, she starts to procrastinate. If she doesn't start a task until the last minute, then she can blame the short time period for the poor quality of her work rather than blaming herself.

#### **Tips for working with Haley, THE PERFECTIONIST:**

- Discuss what it means to do your "best". Nobody puts 150% effort into EVERY task – learn to prioritize.
- Provide options to work alone or with others. When collaboration is necessary, meet with Haley ahead of time to talk about how to work together, how to give constructive criticism and how to focus on your own parts of the task.
- Check in with her throughout larger tasks to make sure she's not getting overwhelmed. Help her break these larger tasks into smaller chunks to make them more manageable.
- Discuss project ideas with Haley to help her keep them doable.



Have you met Ingrid? Nothing gets past her. She notices your new haircut, is the first to see a different poster hanging in the classroom and always finds Waldo on every page. She can tell when a classmate is feeling upset about a rough start to the day and reads your body language better than anyone else in the room. Ingrid makes thoughtful connections between comments and ideas, picking up on small details that others miss. This skill

sometimes means that Ingrid feels the need to point out every word you misspell on the board and may announce the answer to a problem while the rest of the class is still mulling it over. Looking for someone to look through the new I Spy book with? Need a proofreader for the class newsletter? You can count on Ingrid!

#### **Tips for working with Ingrid, THE NOTICER:**

- Challenge her with increasingly complex or abstract visuals and ideas to hone her skills of observation.
- Provide Ingrid with tasks that call for keen observation skills, like media interpretation, categorizing, or devising analogies to teach others.
- Explain to Ingrid when it is helpful to point out other's' mistakes in a kind way and when you should keep it to yourself.



Have you met Horace? His mind is like Gumby – flexible and creative! He lives outside of the box. He always finds an unusual way to look at things and often creates multiple solutions for problems. He has his own way of working things out. You'll hear him say: "how about this way?", "I have another idea!" or "could I do it like this instead?". At first, his methods may seem far-fetched, but hang in there and he'll explain his way of thinking. However, sometimes he can't retrace his steps because his idea or solution just flashed into his mind. Solving the math problem using Roman Numerals makes so much sense to him that he can't imagine why his neighbor would look at his paper as if it were an alien from Mars. Brainstorming is right up his alley and no idea is too outlandish!

#### **Tips for working with Horace, THE FLUID THINKER:**

- Offer open-ended activities that invite various methods of thinking.
- Emphasize the thinking and the solution over a specific process.
- When you need Horace to practice a specific way of doing something, explain why so he understands the value of that method.
- Teach Horace how to record his thinking.
- Pair him up with a student who doesn't know how to begin a task, so Horace can provide a list of starting ideas.



Have you met Samantha? She is the first (and sometimes only) student to laugh at your clever puns or sophisticated jokes. She loves to read Calvin & Hobbes, creates amusing captions for comics from The New Yorker and wears a Monty Python shirt to school. Books like The Phantom Tollbooth and Matilda are kindred spirits to Samantha. She truly thrives in an intellectual environment and even loves to learn about learning! Sometimes, her own jokes go over her classmates' heads, and her sophisticated sense of humor may seem weird to them (so a scientist and an amoeba walk into a bar...).

**Tips for working with Samantha, THE IDIOSYNCRATIC SOPHISTICATE:**

- Provide her with outlets for her humor, like creative writing, art, and literature.
- If possible, connect her with a like-minded peer.
- Explain to her why her peers may not laugh at her jokes (or yours!).

\*Twelve common characteristics of giftedness used to create the above personas:

- Superior Abstract Thinking
- Super Communication
- Learns More Rapidly
- Heightened Curiosity
- Broader & Deeper Knowledge and Interests
- Long Attention Span
- Independent
- Heightened Sensitivity
- Critical of Self, Ideas, Others; Perfectionist
- Keen Observer
- Imaginative & Original
- Keen Sense of Humor

*Personas created by Molly Kellogg and art by Charlotte Agell; tool created in collaboration*

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