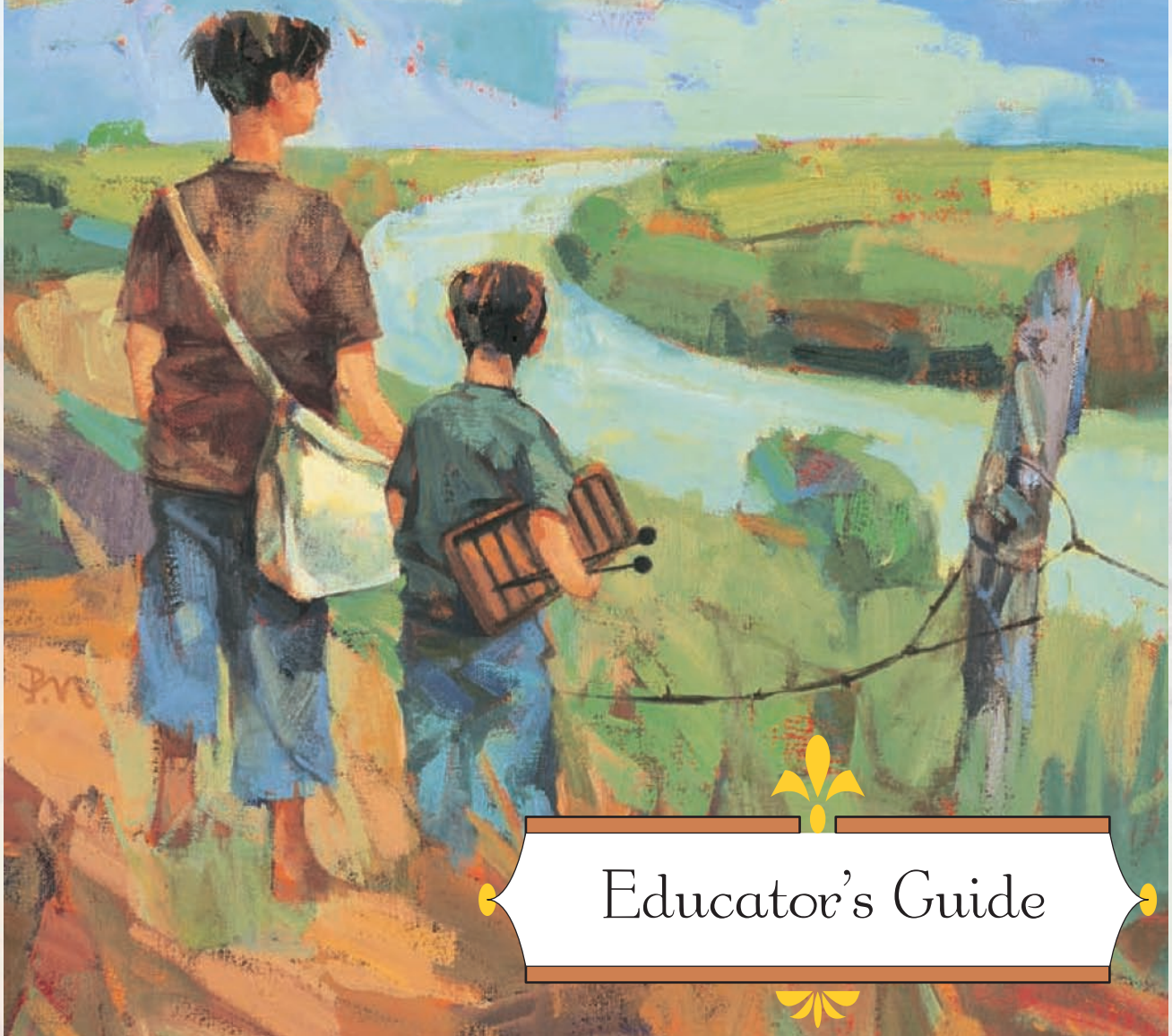
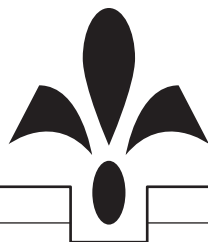


Alma Fullerton

# Libertad



Educator's Guide



Unit  
Studies



# Part One



Libertad finds a treasure trove of marbles in the garbage dump in Guatemala City, where he lives with his mother and little brother, Julio. When he is not scrounging through the garbage for food and materials that he can salvage and sell, Libertad plays with his friends, Antonio and Esvin.

We learn his father is living in America at an address that Mami clutches in her hands. The family was driven from their home in the countryside by the arrival of soldiers.

Libertad dreams of being able to send Julio to school, but his mother tells him that they can't afford it. They also need Julio's help sorting cardboard in the dump. But Libertad is determined to save whatever money he can to pay for his brother's education.

One day, Julio finds a discarded marimba and the family enjoys a fleeting moment of joy as they are caught up in the music he makes, just as his father used to do in happier days.

## Before Reading

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**STUDY THE MAP AT THE BEGINNING OF THE BOOK.** Find Guatemala and Guatemala City. Using the scale at the bottom of the map, measure the approximate distance in kilometers from Guatemala City to Laredo, Texas, USA.

Now look at a map of the world and find your home town or city. Measure out an equal distance from where you live to somewhere else in your country.

Topics for discussion: Imagine walking across that distance. What sorts of difficulties do you think you might have? Why might someone choose to make this sort of journey?

Study the front cover of *Libertad*. Using specific clues from the picture, predict what you think the story is about.

## After Reading

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1. Define “setting” and have students discuss what they have learned about the setting of this novel, so far.
2. Ask: “What do we know about the characters so far? What sort of relationships do we see in this family?” Be sure to have students use examples from the novel.
3. Ask, “Why does Libertad think that it is so important for Julio to go to school. Do you agree? Why or why not?”

## Go Further

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**DISCUSS THE IDEA OF “HOME.”** What details does the author use to create a sense of home, even though Libertad’s family lives in a dump? Have students brainstorm their own definition and conceptions of what home means to them. What elements do they have in common with Libertad? What differences are there? Use a Venn diagram to illustrate these differences and similarities.

(See Appendix 1)



## Unit Two: Pages 27 to 51

Days filled with labour and hunger can still hold happiness and hope for Libertad and Julio. They adopt a puppy, Guerrero, who acts as a guardian angel for Julio and scares off vultures and thieves. Libertad discovers that he has been able to save enough money to send Julio to school after all. An organization called Safe Passage promises to provide Julio and his family with food and school supplies as long as Julio stays in school. With a heavy heart, Libertad refuses the teacher's offer to join Julio at school since he knows that his family relies on his labour for their survival.

Libertad teaches his little brother to play the marimba in the evenings. Life seems to be going well, until one "Bad Day" when Mami is buried in an avalanche of garbage.

### Before Reading

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**VISIT THE WEBSITE [HTTP://WWW.SAFEPASSAGE.ORG](http://www.safepassage.org)** to learn more about this community-based organization that helps children in Guatemala go to school. Talk about the reasons why children are unable to attend school in many developing countries.

### After Reading

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1. Look for examples of people crying in this part of the book. Ask: "Why do the characters cry? Are they happy tears or sad tears? Can the tears be both happy and sad at the same time?" Explain.
2. Libertad must make two decisions in this section. Have students look at these two decisions and make a list for each side of each decision. In groups, have them discuss and evaluate Libertad's decisions. (*See Appendix 2*)

3. Look at “Bad Day”. Ask students to explain what they think the last line means. What details give us clues that something terrible is happening?
- The title “Bad Day”, even though Libertad says “It is a good garbage day” three times
  - Guerrero barking hard
  - the zigzagging bulldozer
  - the hot sun beating down on them
  - Libertad closing his eyes and dreaming, not paying attention
  - Mami “unaware”

## Go Further

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**THE VILLANELLE:** The villanelle is a poetic form with a prescribed pattern of two-rhyme sounds. It is nineteen lines long, consisting of five three-line stanzas (tercets) and one concluding four-line stanza (quatrain). The first and third lines of the first stanza are special: they rhyme with each other; each of them is used alternately as the last line of the following stanzas; and they conclude the poem as a rhyming couplet.

Read “Bad Day” (p. 50-51) aloud to the class. Guide them through the patterns of the villanelle and help them to recognize the repeated patterns that they hear in the passage.

Other examples of villanelles:

- “Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night” by Dylan Thomas
- “The House on the Hill” by Edwin Arlington Robinson

For a fun villanelle example (“The Villanelle Sandwich”) visit: <http://www.catandgirl.com/view.php?loc=383>



## Unit Three: Pages 52 to 73

Libertad and Julio dig frantically, trying to find their mother beneath the enormous mound of garbage. But it is no use. Eventually, they come to the realization that she is gone forever – even the magic of the marimba cannot bring her back. Libertad decides to pack up their things and set off on a journey to find their father in America.

In order to feed himself and his brother along the way, Libertad must become a thief. A fortuitous discovery of a 10-quetzal note allows the boys to catch a “chicken bus” north.

### Before Reading

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**HAVE STUDENTS BRAINSTORM A LIST** of ten essential things that they would want to pack in their backpacks if they suddenly had to leave their homes behind forever. As a class discuss the reasons behind some of their choices.

### After Reading

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1. Have students compare the lists that they made “Before Reading” with the list of things that Libertad decides to take with him. Ask: “Why do you think that Libertad chooses these items?”
2. Libertad and Julio do a lot of running in these passages (p. 63, 65, 66, 67, 69, 73). Read each passage aloud and have students list the reasons why they need to run in each instance. How is the last time that they run different from the other times?

### Go Further

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**HAVE STUDENTS CREATE A COMIC STRIP** of 5-10 frames of the events from these chapters. Give them the option of using words and images or images only. Encourage them to choose their details carefully—not everything is important to include. Provide them with examples from graphic novels, if possible.

# Part Two



## Unit Four: Pages 74 to 101

Libertad and Julio ride the “chicken bus” out of Guatemala City and into Antigua. At a market, they earn money playing their marimba to buy some food and another bus fare to Totonicapan. A friendly farmer named Santos offers them a lift north toward Quetzaltenango. His family feeds the boys and offers them lodging for the night. The next day, Libertad and Julio walk to the city. At the market, they try to earn money playing their marimba again, but they are cheated by the stall-owner. Still, they earn enough to catch another “chicken bus” to Mexico. At the border, Libertad is afraid that the guard will turn them away, but instead he wishes them luck as they dash across the border.

## Before Reading

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**HAVE STUDENTS CREATE A WEB OF INFLUENCE.** In the centre, they will draw a sketch or a symbol of themselves. Branching out from the centre, they will draw and label a sketch of people who have influenced their lives. In point form, they can list 2-4 ways in which each person has affected them.

## After Reading

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1. Read the opening stanza of Part Two on p. 75 (Freedom’s Journey). Discuss the meaning of the stanza. Have students copy out the stanza and create a poster around it, using ideas from the discussion.
2. Re-visit the Web of Influence activity. In small groups, students can create a Web of Influence for Libertad using the characters we have encountered in the novel.

## Go Further

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**USING THE INTERNET AND LIBRARY RESOURCES,** students can research one of the locales that Libertad and Julio visit on their journey. Encourage them to share their findings with the class by creating a short presentation that includes some visual aspect (photographs, artwork, maps, etc.).





## Unit Five: Pages 102 to 130

Fernando, another man heading to America to find his family, encourages Libertad to find a factory job in Tapachula. Guerrero “babysits” Julio during the days while Libertad earns enough money at a tortilla factory to keep them fed and clothed. They eventually save up enough money to move on. They learn about danger on their journey: immigrant-smugglers or “coyotes”; immigrants who try to ride the trains, only to be caught and sent home by soldiers; thieves ready to steal their pesos. But they also learn about kindness. Manuel Barrio and his wife, Luisa, give the boys a job and a home on their farm during planting season. The boys are very happy – too happy. When Manuel and Luisa offer to adopt Libertad and Julio, Libertad must make a very difficult decision. Even though the Julio is determined to stay with their new “family”, Libertad cannot give up his dream of finding their father.

### Before Reading

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**HAVE STUDENTS LOOK AT THEIR VENN DIAGRAMS** of “Home” from the beginning of Part One (*see appendix 1*). Ask, “How has Libertad’s home situation changed? What is missing now? Do any elements of “home” still remain?”

### After Reading

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1. In pairs, have students debate the pros and cons of Libertad and Julio staying with Manuel and Luisa. Ask, “Why is it so important for Libertad to move on? Do you think it was selfish of him to force Julio to stay with him?”
2. Discuss what Libertad means when he says, “Manuel’s laughter / fills up a hole deep inside me / I thought no one / could find“(p. 121).

## Go Further

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**CHILD LABOUR:** In this section, Libertad works at two different jobs: first, in a tortilla factory, and second, on a farm. Examine the role of child workers in Mexico and Central America. How many children work for a living? What laws are in place (if any) to protect them? What organizations exist to support children's rights in these parts of the world?

For more information, visit the following sites:

- <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/iclp/sweat/mexico.htm>
- <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/25.htm>
- <http://www.freethechildren.com/index.php>

Further Reading: *The Carpet Boy's Gift* by Pegi Deitz Shea (Tilbury House)


Unit Six: Pages 131 to 156



Libertad and Julio arrive in Mexico City where they meet a young street beggar, Pedro, who gives them a place to stay and the protection of his gang. Libertad is entranced by Pedro's charisma and ability to charm money from passersby. Pedro offers Libertad his first "hit" of solvents as a way to forget his troubles. Soon, however, Libertad forgets more than his unhappy past – he forgets his determination to create a better future for himself and Julio. Libertad stays in Mexico City, begging for food, getting high, neglecting Julio, and losing hope. But when Julio is viciously beaten by the police, he confronts his older brother with an ultimatum: leave with me now or I'm leaving without you. Libertad wonders, "which brother is taking care of which."

## Before Reading

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**IN THIS CHAPTER, LIBERTAD BEGINS TO USE** solvents as a means of escaping his pain. Talk about this form of drug abuse with students and discuss the effects of these chemicals on the brain. Explore the internet to learn more: [http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/news\\_info/drugs/solvents.htm](http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/news_info/drugs/solvents.htm)

## After Reading

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1. Divide the class into small groups and assign each of them 2 or 3 chapters from the segment. Have each group study the titles of their chapters and explain the significance of the author's choice of titles. Ask: "How does the title reflect the content of the chapter. Does it suggest or represent something more?"
2. Libertad was determined to leave a comfortable and stable home with Manuel and Luisa so that he and Julio can find their Papi. Ask: "What has changed for Libertad now?"

## Go Further

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**HAVE STUDENTS USE THE MAKING DECISIONS SHEET** (see appendix 2) to formulate a dialogue between two characters in this segment, based on events that they imagine could have happened during this period of this story. Give them an opportunity to perform their dialogues for each other.



## Unit Seven: Pages 157 to 179

Libertad is jolted back to reality, and the brothers move north toward the American border. They pick up a ride with a group of traveling musicians who recognize the boys from the market. They become part of the band, which takes the name La Libertad, and earn money playing at a wedding. From there, the boys catch a ride to Monterrey. Outside Monterrey, a man tries to rob them, but Guerrero chases the would-be thief away.

### Before Reading

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**MONEY CONVERSION:** How much is 300 pesos in dollars? Look up the currency exchange. Have students create a short list of common goods and services. Then have them investigate and compare the costs of those goods and services where they live to the costs of similar goods and services in Mexico.

### After Reading

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1. As a group, plot out a story arc for this segment. Using a scale from 1-10, with 1 being a “low” point for Libertad and 10 being a “high” point for him, what events would students rate as “low” and “high”? What would this look like on a line graph?
2. Libertad and Julio “rescue” two things from the dump: the marimba and their pet, Guerrero. Ask: “So far in this story, how have the marimba and Guerrero saved the boys?”

### Go Further

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**FREE VERSE OFFERS** a unique perspective and way of expressing a character’s voice. Have students try their hand at creating their own passages of free verse.

Topic suggestions:

- choose another character (or animal) from the book and write a scene from their perspective
- choose an event from the news and write a reaction to it, from your own perspective or from an imagined perspective of someone directly involved in the news event
- reflect on something from your own life


## Unit Eight: Pages 180 to 211


As the boys inch closer to Nuevo Laredo and the border, they must keep watch for border patrols and avoid being caught. The swirling Rio Grande River looks too dangerous to cross, and Libertad prays that Mami can send them a miracle. Just then, Guerrero digs up a life jacket left behind by “someone who knows about freedom”. The boys dig up a second life jacket and make the treacherous journey across the river. Libertad loses his grip on Julio and almost drowns. He has visions of his life thus far and of his parents, who help to guide him to the surface. Once he is safely on the shore, Libertad is relieved to find that Julio and Guerrero have also made it across to Texas. Finally, with the help of Miriam, one more friendly stranger, Libertad and Julio are united with their Papi. At the bottom of his bag, Libertad finds one of the marbles he rescued from the dump that he left behind: “Like that marble, / I’ve pulled myself / from the dump / and I’m safe...”

### Before Reading

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**STUDENTS CAN PREDICT THE ENDING** of the story. Will Libertad and Julio cross the border and find their father? What obstacles could still prevent them from succeeding in their quest? If they do not find their father, what options do they have for their future? If they do find their father, what challenges do you think they will still have to face?

### After Reading

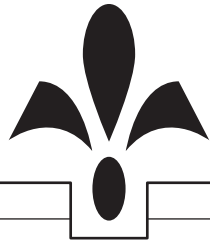
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1. Students can complete a Character Study Web sheet about Libertad and/or Julio (*see appendix 3*). Remind students to find evidence in the text (including page numbers) to support their analyses.
2. Discuss “symbols” with the class. A symbol is something concrete (physical) that represents something abstract (an emotion, an idea, etc). For example, a dove is often used to represent peace. Have students think about objects in this story that are used as symbols to represent feelings or ideas (the marimba, the marbles, Papi’s address, the life jackets, etc.) Then, have students fill in one of the symbol sheets provided (*see appendix 4*) or create one of their own.

### Go Further

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**NOW THAT LIBERTAD AND JULIO** have found their father, have students reflect on the boys’ journey. Ask them to write a letter to Libertad’s friend Antonio from Libertad’s point of view. In their letter, they should consider including some of the best and worst parts of Libertad’s journey, as well as advice for Antonio if he were to decide to try to come north to the United States.



Culminating  
Activities



# The Libertad Board Game

**LIBERTAD AND JULIO HAVE COMPLETED A JOURNEY FULL OF PITFALLS AND SMALL SUCCESSES.** Have students create a board game based on the brothers' journey from Guatemala City to Texas. Begin by asking them about some of their favourite board games. What features of these board games do they enjoy?

Some components that they should consider incorporating into their board games include the following:

- character pieces for Libertad, Julio, Guerrero
- character pieces that represent "the immigrant"
- pitfalls or danger zones (for example: your bag of pesos is stolen while you sleep – go back 3 spaces)
- trivia cards that reflect the story's content
- activity challenges based on events in the story
- a combination of luck- and skill-based methods of advancing through the game

Encourage students to be as creative as possible with their game's design.

Each game should be presented in an appropriately decorated box, complete with original title, with a clear list of rules and instructions for playing the game.

# The Marimba

**THE MODERN MARIMBA HAS DEVELOPED FROM THE CENTRAL AMERICAN VERSION** of the African Xylophone, and is only approximately 100 years old. The bars are generally made from Honduras Rosewood, but it can be made from several other types of wood, which are all very rare and expensive! The Marimba is the national instrument of Guatemala.

Find some examples of marimba music at the library or on the internet. Give students an opportunity to hear the sort of music that Libertad's family would have been listening to.

In small groups, students can create dance sequences to a short passage of marimba music and present their dances to the class.



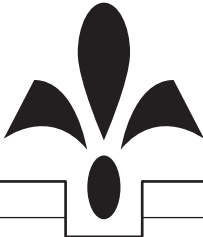
# The Tableau

**A TABLEAU IS A FROZEN “PICTURE” CREATED BY THE STUDENTS.** These pictures represent an event, idea, or feeling from the novel. Creating a tableau is meant to encourage discussion and reflection. Through the use of body position, posture, and expression, the group members can “reflect” a moment from the novel. Students should be directed to use all the spaces (low, middle, and high space) within the performance area. Each tableau should contain one main focal point so that the audience knows where to look and is not distracted by competing points of focus.

Divide the class into small groups of 3-4 students. Have each group present two or three important scenes from the novel in tableau form.

One further element to the tableau exercise is “thought-tracking.” Once the tableau is set, the teacher can tap individuals in the tableau on the shoulder. That student will speak the character’s thoughts out loud.

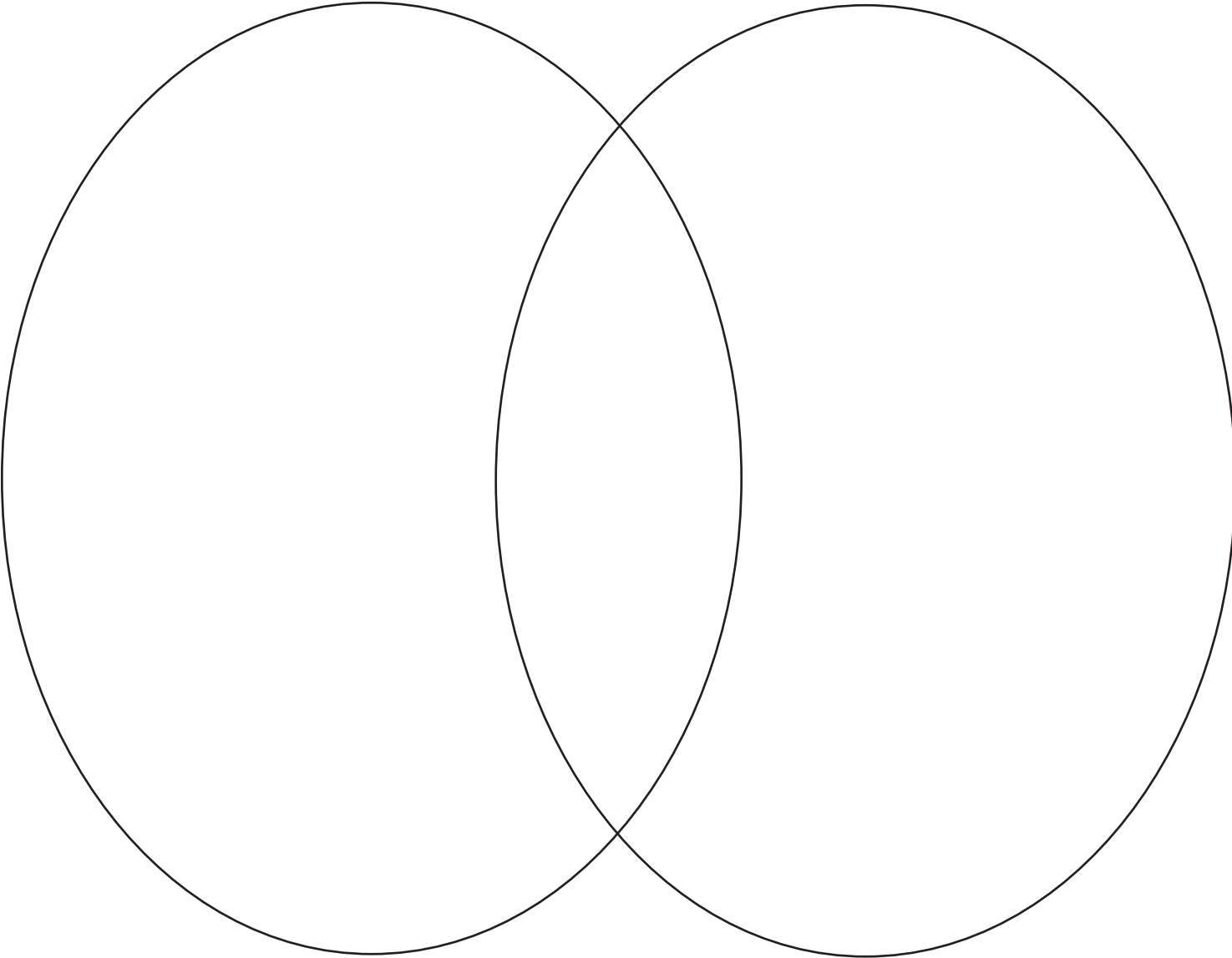
*(See appendix 5 for rubric and student worksheet.)*



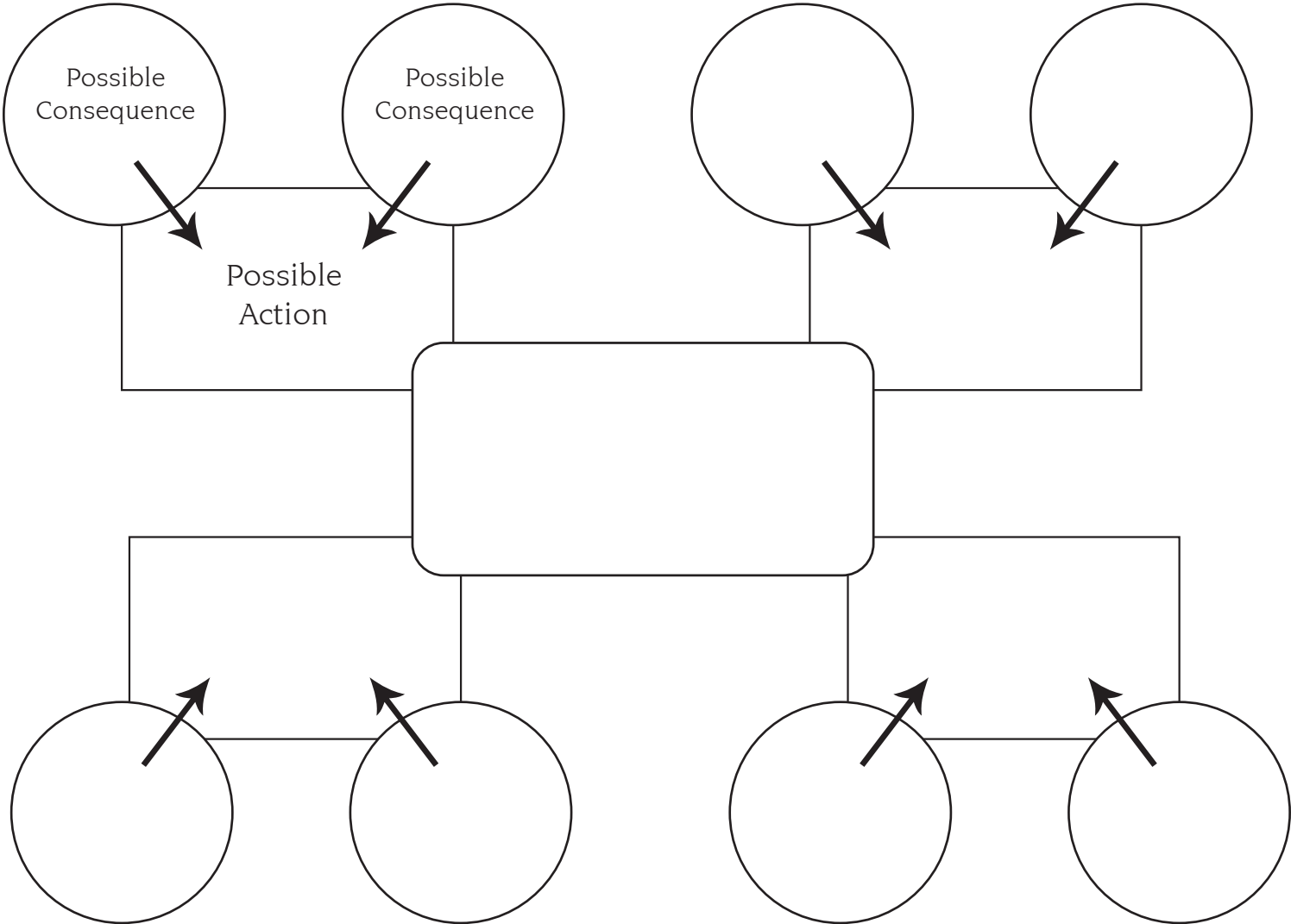
Appendix



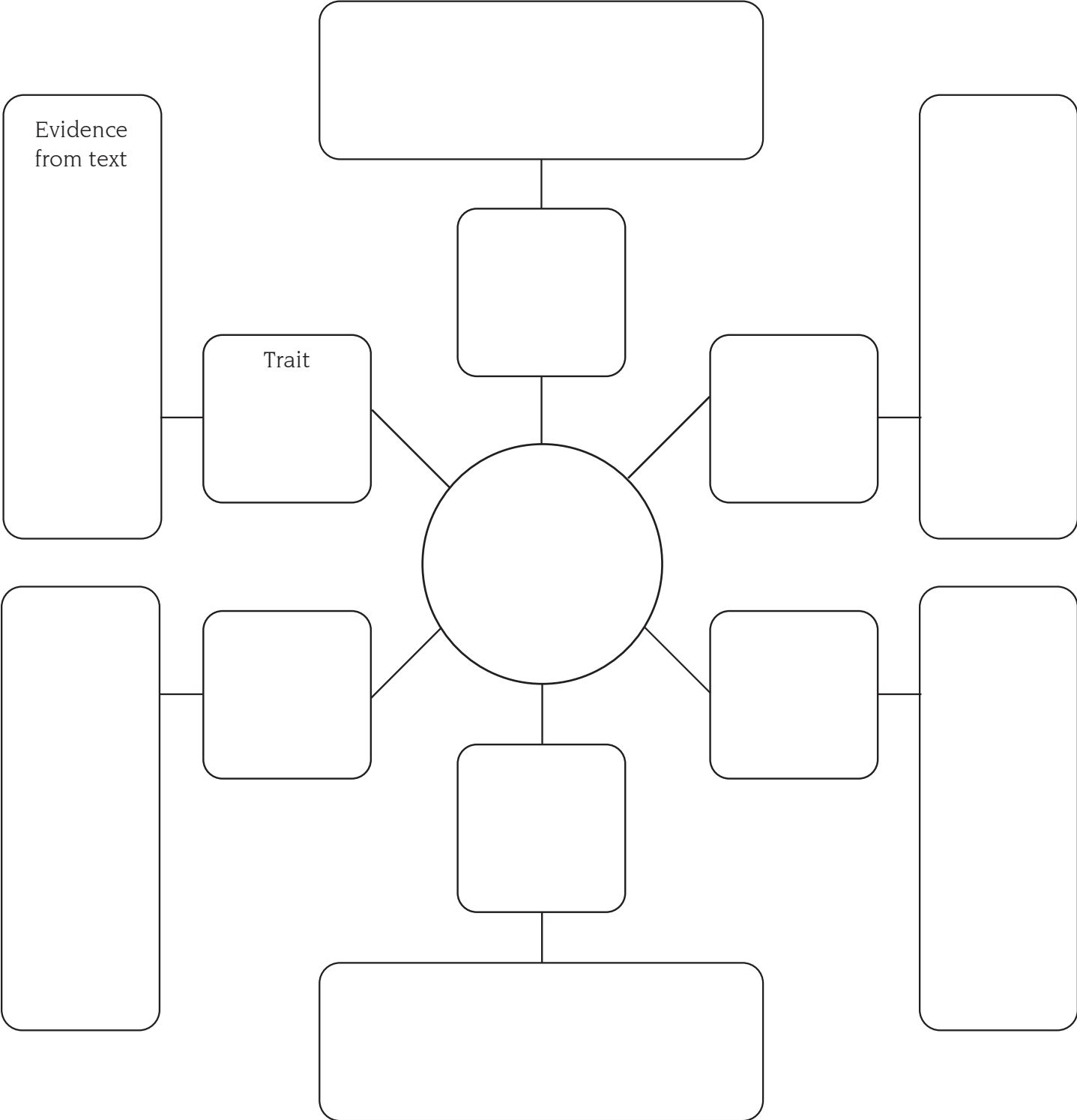
# Venn Diagram



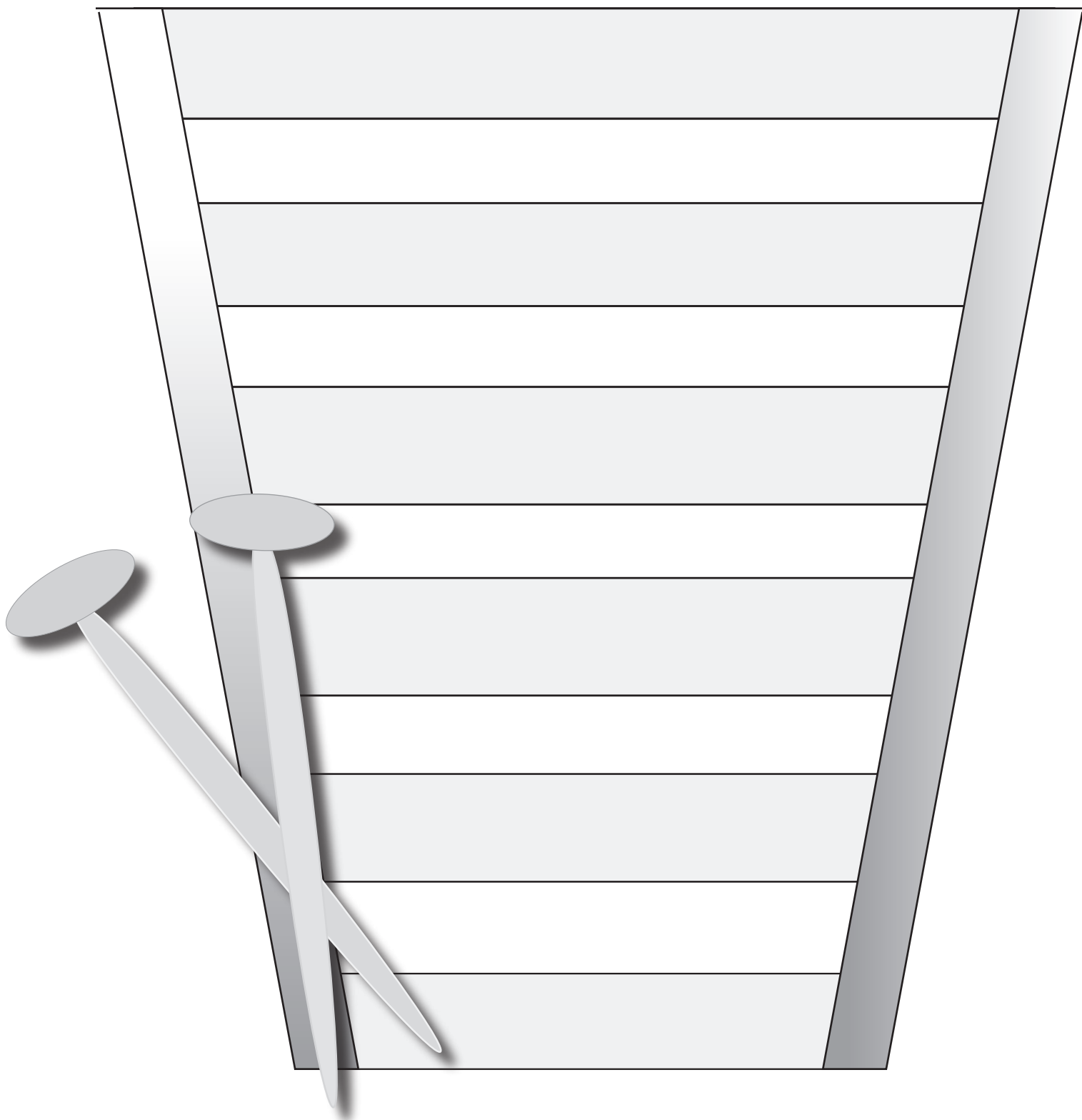
# Making Decisions



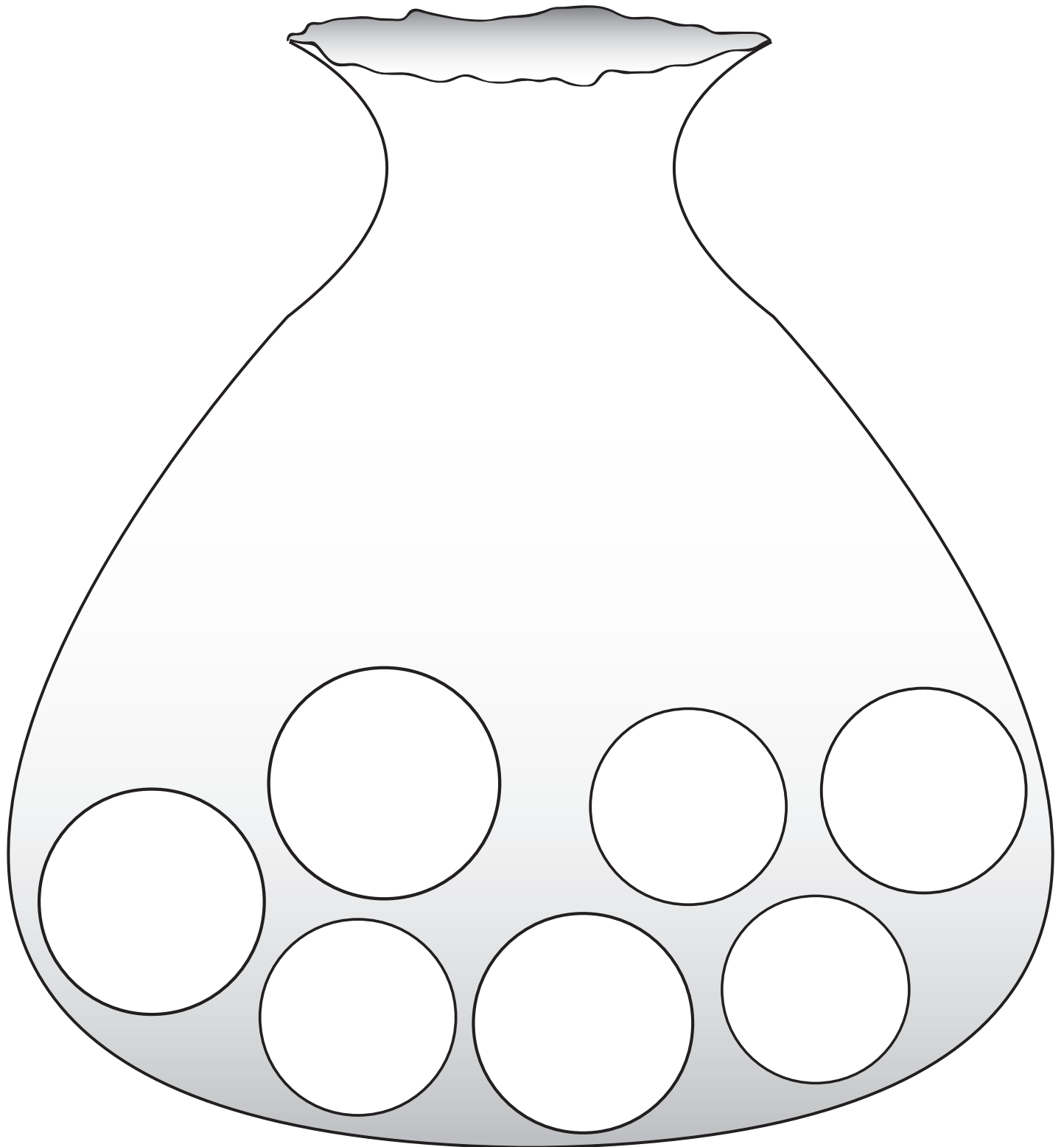
# Character Development: Character Study Web



The marimba represents...



The marbles represent...



# Tableau Rubric

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

COMPONENTS	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
PLANNING AND COOPERATION	The group has difficulty planning due to lack of cooperation skills and attention on the part of some members	Problem solving is challenging. Roles are not defined or accepted. One or two members do most of the work.	Group works together and roles are shared.	Group works together effectively and roles are shared equitably. New ideas are embraced and all group members feel valued. Leaders grow by sharing leadership roles.
DELIVERY SKILLS	Opening and closing are vague and leave the audience confused. Performance is partially audible and expression does not match emotion.	Opening and closing are defined. Most voices are clear and contain appropriate expression.	Opening and closing are well presented. Voices are generally clear and contain appropriate expression.	Clear and strong opening and closing. All voices are concentrated and expressive. Eye contact is made. There is always a congruency between affect and facial expression.
TABLEAU SKILLS	There is no focal point to the tableau. Body language and expression are not used effectively. Backs are facing the audience. Playful energy and risk-taking are not evident.	More than one focal point. Performers do not use all three levels of space: high, middle and low. Performances are usually open to the audience. Playful energy and risk-taking are rarely seen. Use of props and costumes are unimaginative.	One focal point for the audience. Most levels of space are occupied and staging choices match content. Performers are open to the audience. Playful energy and risk-taking are sometimes evident. Some creative use of props and costumes.	One clear focal point for audience. Staging choices match content. Low, middle and high levels of space are used. Performers are always open to the audience. Playful energy and risk-taking are evident. Creative use of props and costumes.

STUDENT COMMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

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