



# Using Intensities in the Classroom



## Overview

This series of lessons was designed to meet the needs of gifted children for extension beyond the standard curriculum with the greatest ease of use for the educator. The lessons may be given to the students for individual self-guided work, or they may be taught in a classroom or a homeschool setting. Assessment strategies and rubrics are included at the end of each section. The rubrics often include a column for “scholar points,” which are invitations for students to extend their efforts beyond that which is required, incorporating creativity or higher level technical skills.

The lessons were developed by Lisa Van Gemert, M.Ed.T., the Mensa Foundation’s Youth & Education Ambassador. This lesson plan was created in collaboration with Ian Byrd of Byrdseed.com.

## Introduction

Intensities (sometimes called Overexcitabilities) provide a useful tool to analyze content because they resonate with many learners, particularly the gifted. Inviting students to recognize themselves in content deepens understanding and provides motivation for stronger analysis.



### Guiding Question

How can teachers use intensities to enable students to analyze and their deepen understanding of literature and other curricula?

### Learning Objectives

After completing this lesson plan, students will be able to:

- Analyze characters using a framework of intensities
- Compare and contrast multiple characters
- Create written analytical assessment of characters
- Apply intensities to a variety of content areas

## Part 1: Introduce intensities

Introduce Intensities to your students (use the slides 3 – 47 of the slidedeck at [bit.ly/usingintensity](http://bit.ly/usingintensity) to do so). If you would like to strengthen your understanding of Intensities, read *Living With Intensity: Understanding the Sensitivity, Excitability, and the Emotional Development of Gifted Children, Adolescents, and Adults* by Susan Daniels (Editor), Michael M. Piechowski (Editor).

A transcript for slides 3 & 4 is as follows:

Slide 3: The Polish psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski invented a theory of personality development that he called “Positive Disintegration.” as part of this theory about how people’s personalities coalesce, Dabrowski posited that overexcitabilities, which were heightened physiological experiences, caused people to experience daily life more intensely – to feel ups and downs more profoundly than people without overexcitabilities. We all have them sometimes, but there are people whose intensities become pathological, literally a disease process that diminishes their ability to function in their environment. Even though this could be considered negative, Dabrowski didn’t see it that way. He believed that this conflict was necessary, and that people who had OE would have more and more intense little mini crises that would lead them eventually to fully develop themselves.

Slide 4: And they can be described in general as above average reaction to stimuli. We experience sensation more strongly than others. Oh, that grass is so green....

To check for understanding, have students complete the following short quiz. The quiz has no right or wrong answers. Rather, it is an opportunity for reflection on the content.



## Understanding Intensities

Remember that there are five kinds of intensity:

- intellectual
- psychomotor
- sensual
- imaginational
- emotional

Keeping that in mind, respond to the following questions based on what you learned about intensities.

1. Which of the following characteristics of intellectual intensity do you think is most common in the world?
  - a. curiosity
  - b. concentration
  - c. focus
  - d. strong memory
  - e. independent thinking
  - f. blurting out
  - g. strong visual memory
  - h. hypercriticism
  
2. Which do you think is most common among people you know your age?
  - a. curiosity
  - b. concentration
  - c. focus
  - d. strong memory
  - e. independent thinking
  - f. blurting out
  - g. strong visual memory
  - h. hypercriticism
  
3. Which of the intensities would be the most helpful if you were a...

scientist	
ballerina	
physician	
teacher	
author	
journalist	



4. Which of the intensities would be the most difficult to work with if you were a ...

scientist	
ballerina	
physician	
teacher	
author	
journalist	

5. In your opinion, which of the following would be most likely pose the greatest challenge to someone with sensual intensity?

- a. a knock at the door
- b. buzzing fluorescent lights
- c. walking in the rain
- d. hot sun
- e. the smell of apple pie baking

6. Which of the following is hardest for you to tune out?

- a. low level conversation
- b. people talking on cell phones
- c. tapping pencils
- d. scratchy tags in clothing
- e. bad smells

7. Which intensity do you think is the hardest to handle in school?

- a. intellectual
- b. psychomotor
- c. sensual
- d. imaginational
- e. emotional

8. Which intensity do you think is the hardest to handle in a family?

- a. intellectual
- b. psychomotor
- c. sensual
- d. imaginational
- e. emotional

9. Which intensity do you most associate with the following:

a museum	
a laboratory	
a writers' retreat	
a psychologist's office	
a home	



## Part 2: Character Analysis

The comparison and contrast exercise allows the student to evaluate multiple characters in a work in the framework of intensity, and then use that evaluation as the basis of a written analysis comparing and contrasting the manifestation of the intensities in the characters. To prepare, discuss the following chart.

Intensities							
Name of Character/Person	Type of Intensity			Level of Intensity			
Albert Einstein	Intellectual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Psychomotor	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Sensual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Imaginational	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Emotional	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
Bugs Bunny	Intellectual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Psychomotor	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Sensual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Imaginational	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Emotional	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
A member of your family (no name – just keep a person in your mind)	Intellectual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Psychomotor	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Sensual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Imaginational	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Emotional	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
A friend (no name – just keep a person in your mind)	Intellectual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Psychomotor	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Sensual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Imaginational	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Emotional	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high



**Entire Book Opportunities.**

The *Evaluating Characters Using Intensities* grid below is designed for five characters. Simply leave rows blank if you evaluating fewer than five characters.

<b>Evaluating Characters Using Intensities</b>							
<b>Name of Character</b>	<b>Type of Intensity</b>			<b>Level of Intensity</b>			
	Intellectual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Psychomotor	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Sensual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Imaginational	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Emotional	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Intellectual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Psychomotor	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Sensual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Imaginational	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Emotional	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Intellectual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Psychomotor	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Sensual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Imaginational	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Emotional	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Intellectual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Psychomotor	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Sensual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Imaginational	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Emotional	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high



## 1. Searching for Intensities

Using the *Evaluating Characters Using Intensities* grid, chart out the characters from the story based on your evaluation of their intensities (or lack of them), as well as the level of those intensities.

Select two characters who display more than one intensity and respond to the following questions, simply circling the word in the question to respond:

Character: \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Do those intensities make the characters more or less likeable?
- b. Does one character have intensities that are stronger or weaker than the other?
- c. Do the intensities manifest themselves more in public or private?
- d. Would the characters find it easy or difficult to rid themselves of the intensities?

## 2. Writing about Intensities

Select **two** characters you have identified with at least **two** intensities at the moderate level or higher. In a well-developed analysis using textual evidence, describe the intensities' effects on the character.

Include the extent to which the intensities affect the character's ability to interact and function within his/her family, society, with other characters, or him/herself.

Compare and contrast the level and manifestation of the intensities.

Use the rubric below as a guide.



### Evaluating Characters' Intensities

CATEGORY	SCHOLAR POINTS AVAILABLE	EXCELLENT 10 9 8 7	MEETS EXPECTATIONS 7 6 5	EMERGING 4 3 2 1
<b>Selection of Characters</b>		Characters selected strongly represented the intensities indicated and were the strongest possible choice of the characters in the story. They demonstrated at least two of the intensities at the moderate level or higher.	Characters selected represented the intensities indicated. They demonstrated at least two of the intensities at the moderate level or higher.	Characters selected did not fully represent the intensities indicated. They demonstrated fewer than two of the intensities at the moderate level or higher.
<b>Comparison &amp; Contrast</b>	Analysis makes allusion to characters in other works with similar intensities and includes a comparison to those characters that is insightful and deepens the understanding of the analyzed characters.	The comparison of the characters reveals not only the intensities themselves, but also the differences in the way(s) those intensities affected the characters. Strong and insightful analysis.	The comparison of the characters reveals the intensities themselves. Analysis is at the expected level.	The comparison of the characters does not fully reveal the intensities. Analysis is below the expected level.
<b>Textual Support</b>		The textual support aligns well with the selected intensities, adding to the understanding and supporting the argument.	The textual support aligns with the selected intensities.	The textual support weakly aligns with the selected intensities.
<b>Organization</b>	The organization makes effective use of the arguments and textual evidence to persuade the reader to the writer's point.	The writing is clear, logical, and internally consistent.	The writing is generally clear and consistent.	No clear organization is evident.
<b>Grammar and mechanics.</b>	Writer uses complex and compelling syntax that elevates the quality of the writing significantly.	Spelling and grammar are accurate.	Spelling and grammar are mostly accurate.	Multiple spelling or grammatical errors.

**SCORE:** \_\_\_\_\_ /50 + scholar points \_\_\_\_\_ for a total of \_\_\_\_\_





### Single Character Opportunities.

#### 1. Searching for Intensities

Using the *Evaluating Characters Using Intensities* grid below, chart out a character from the story.

Select a character that displays more than one intensity and respond to the following questions, simply circling the word in the question to respond:

Character: \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Do those intensities make the character more or less likeable?
- b. Do the intensities manifest themselves more in public or private?
- c. Would the character find it easy or difficult to rid him/herself of the intensities?
- d. Does that character have one intensity that is stronger or weaker than another intensity?

Evaluating Using Intensities							
Name of Character	Type of Intensity			Level of Intensity			
	Intellectual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Psychomotor	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Sensual	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Imaginational	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high
	Emotional	yes	maybe	no	low	moderate	high

#### 2. Writing about Intensities

In a well-developed analysis using textual evidence, describe the intensities' effects on the character.

Include the extent to which the intensities affect the character's ability to interact and function within his/her family, society, with other characters, or him/herself.

Compare and contrast the level and manifestation of the intensities.

Use the rubric below as a guide.



### Evaluating A Character's Intensities

CATEGORY	SCHOLAR POINTS AVAILABLE	EXCELLENT 10 9 8 7	MEETS EXPECTATIONS 7 6 5	EMERGING 4 3 2 1
<b>Selection of Character</b>		Character selected strongly represents the intensities indicated and was the strongest possible choice of the characters in the story. The character demonstrated at least two of the intensities at the moderate level or higher.	Character selected represented the intensities indicated. He/she demonstrated at least two of the intensities at the moderate level or higher.	Character selected did not fully represent the intensities indicated. He/she demonstrated fewer than two of the intensities at the moderate level or higher.
<b>Analysis</b>	Analysis makes allusion to character(s) in other works with similar intensities and includes a comparison to that (those) character(s) that is insightful and deepens the understanding of the analyzed character.	The analysis of the character reveals not only the intensities themselves, but also the differences in the way(s) those intensities affected the character. Strong and insightful analysis.	The analysis of the character reveals the intensities themselves. Analysis is at the expected level.	The analysis of the character does not fully reveal the intensities. Analysis is below the expected level.
<b>Textual Support</b>		The textual support aligns well with the selected intensities, adding to the understanding and supporting the argument.	The textual support aligns with the selected intensities.	The textual support weakly aligns with the selected intensities.
<b>Organization</b>	The organization makes effective use of the arguments and textual evidence to persuade the reader to the writer's point.	The writing is clear, logical, and internally consistent.	The writing is generally clear and consistent.	No clear organization is evident.
<b>Grammar and mechanics.</b>	Writer uses complex and compelling syntax that elevates the quality of the writing significantly.	Spelling and grammar are accurate.	Spelling and grammar are mostly accurate.	Multiple spelling or grammatical errors.
SCORE: _____ /50 + scholar points _____ for a total of _____				



## Part 3: Other Curricula

### 1. Science

Possible uses of the intensities in the science classroom include:

- a. Weather Analysis: Students can evaluate weather patterns and phenomena, analyzing them from the perspective of intensity. For example:
  - I. What would create greater emotional intensity, a rain storm or a tornado and why?
  - II. How are clouds connected to imaginal intensity?
  - III. In what way is a tornado an example of natural psychomotor intensity?
- b. Chemistry: Students can evaluate the periodic table of the elements from the perspective of intensity. For example:
  - I. Which group is more intense, alkali metals or Noble gases, and why?
  - II. Which group is least intense?
  - III. If you had to create a new compound, and you wanted it to be the most imaginatively intense compound possible, which three elements would you choose and why?
- c. Biology: Students can evaluate life cycles, animals within classification systems, cell division, and other aspects of biology from the perspective of intensity. For example:
  - I. Looking at the life cycle of a plant, which part of the cycle has the most sensual intensity?
  - II. Which animal class is composed of animals with the most imaginal intensity?
  - III. Which stage of cell division is the most intense from a psychomotor perspective?

### 2. Social Studies

Using the same or similar assignments as the ones provided for character analysis, students can evaluate historical figures or political movements.

### 3. Mathematics

Students can examine certain types of number sets as more or less intense. For example, are integers more or less intense than fractions? In what way are irrational numbers more intense than rational numbers? Which type(s) of intensities do you associate with pi?



#### 4. LOTE

When learning languages other than English, students can explore individual words through the lens of intensity. For example:

- a. Identify a verb that could be used to describe each of the intensities and explain why that verb is a strong match for that particular intensity.
- b. What noun do you think you would most likely use to describe intellectual intensity?

#### 5. Music and Art

The analysis of music and art works well using the intensities as a tool of analysis. Students can be asked to evaluate a work from the perspective of each intensity. They can be asked to decide if a piece's intensity interferes with or enhances the viewer's appreciation/interpretation of the work.

Additionally, they can be asked to create works that specifically match one of the intensities.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. Virtually every content area can be viewed using the intensities as a tool of analysis in an almost unlimited variety of ways.