

# Novel Study: Character profile

This package focuses on analyzing a character's profile in terms of their risk for gang involvement. It includes the following pages:

- **Character Profile: Intake**  
Students identify and describe the complexity of a character and their context.
- **Character Profile: Risks and Protective Factors**  
This explores factors related to join or not joining a gang. Internet resources are included to review compile and assess the factors.
- **Character Profile: Illustrated**  
This is an extension activity to enable students to envision their character and graphically depict the risks and influences they face.
- **Character Profile: Risks and Protective Factors Table**  
This is an organizer for the information gathered from the Internet research on the previous page.
- **Character Profile: Analysis and Referral**  
Students compare risks and protective factors to their initial character profile and identify the key factors they think influence the character. Students are directed to identify community resources that may have offered the character assistance.
- **Potential Risk Factors: Teacher Page**  
This page offers a summary of risks that students may identify in their research.

The pages in this activity package can be used together in your character analysis or may be used separately for general support. You may direct students to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

This package was created to be used with a novel of your choice. To find appropriate gang related literature, there are a number of suggestions and links to assist you or your students in choosing a book below.

## Finding Gang Related Literature:

### Search Your Library Database

Use search terms combinations like "gangs juvenile fiction" to identify books available from your local library or through interlibrary loan.

You may also begin with a book you know and search for books with related subject terms. Some books to begin your search with may be *The Outsiders* (S.E. Hinton) or *Durango Street* (Frank Bonham).

Characters in novels from the Alberta Education non-fiction book list may also be assessed for risk and protective factors, although they may not be formally involved in a gang. Some books that may be used for this purpose are *Maniac Magee* (Jerry Spinelli), *Dragonwings* (Laurence Yep), *The Wild Children* (Felice Holman), *Oliver Twist* (Charles Dickens).

### WebQuests

Many web quests, in addition to having useful or innovative activities, have reading lists or bibliographies which are useful for locating relevant materials.

Here is one useful example : [https://mail.nvnet.org/~cooper\\_j/YouthGangWQSite/](https://mail.nvnet.org/~cooper_j/YouthGangWQSite/)  
Visit the *Gang Novels* page for a collection of resources.

Or visit a webquest repository, for example enter the search term "gangs" at <http://webquest.org/search/index.php>

# Character Profile: Intake

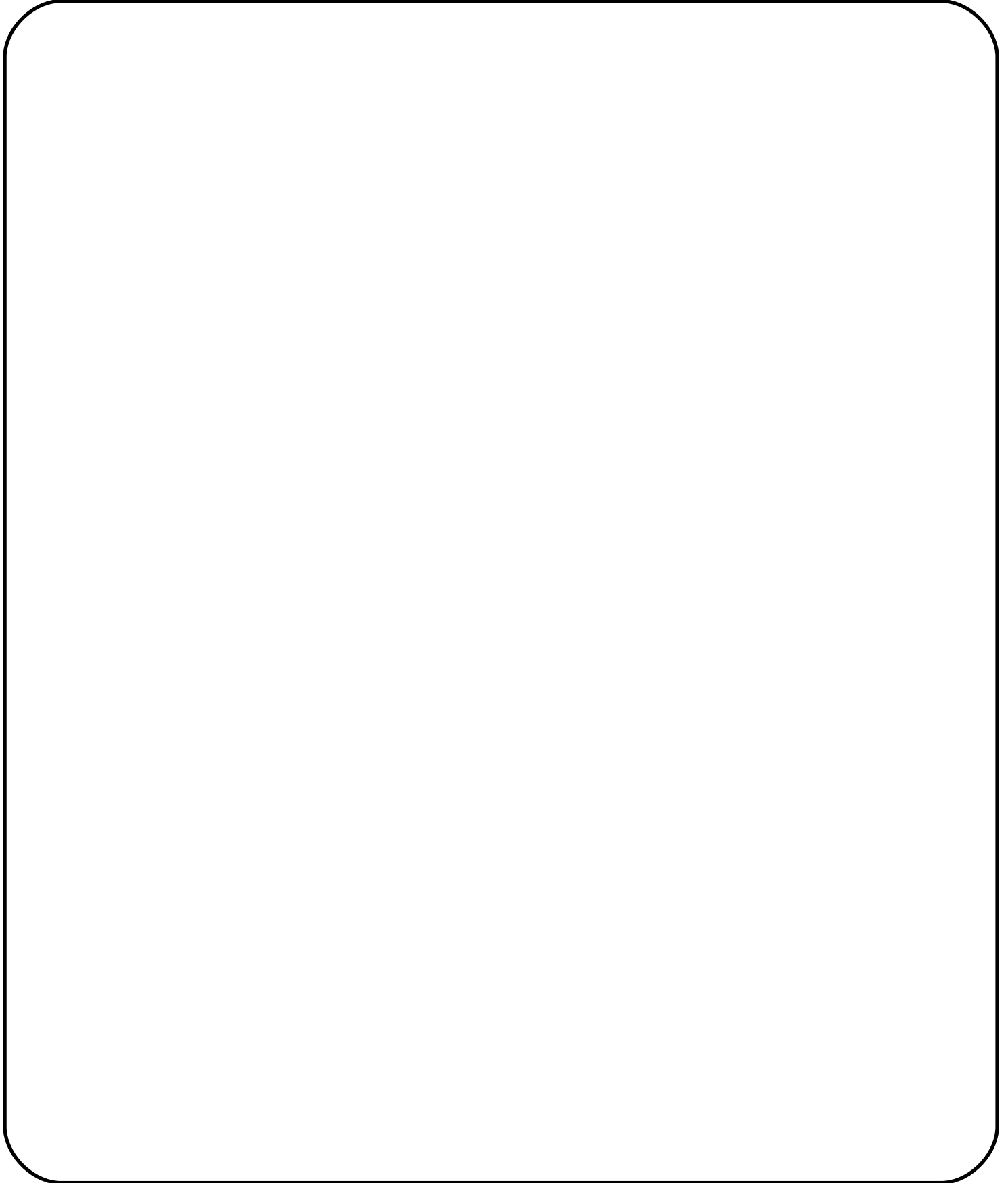
In this activity you will identify and describe a gang member from a story, novel, piece of literature or film to better understand gang involvement.

1) Identify the character:	8) What do they do for fun or in their free time?
2) Describe the character in general terms. What are they like?	9) Give a brief description of the primary influences in their lives.
3) Who are their friends? (give details)	10) What significant problems do they have in their lives?
4) Where do they live? (describe the environment)	11) Describe how they deal with problems or conflict in their lives?
5) What is their family history? (Describe the relationships in detail.)	12) Are they, or have they been, involved in any criminal activity? (describe the circumstances, who, what, where, when, how)
6) How do or did they perform in school? (Describe the circumstances surrounding their performance)	13) Was any violence involved in the crime?
7) Do they smoke, drink, or take drugs?	14) How did they benefit from the crime?

# Character Profile: Illustrated

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Draw your character and graphically depict the risks and influences they face.



# Character Profile: Risks and Protective Factors

In this activity you will explore some of the factors that may be related to your characters decision to join a gang or their potential to become involved in a gang.

Joining a gang is a decision made by a person. Many complex factors contribute to a person making that decision. For that individual, it may even seem like it is the only choice they have. A youth's individual, social, physical, and environmental situation may all play a role in contributing to the decision to join or not join a gang. **Risk factors** and **protective factors** are associated with this decision making process.

**Risk factors** are factors or indicators associated with making the decision to join a gang. Note that these are not causes of gang membership and that some youth may be at risk of joining a gang but never join a gang. Just as the sniffles may indicate that someone is catching a cold and lack of sleep may be a risk factor, these are not causes. Sniffles may be allergy related and people who get very little sleep do not always catch the cold virus. In many cases, however, sniffles and lack of sleep may be factors that indicate a person is about to catch a cold or at greater risk of catching the cold virus.

Risk factors, in the situation of gang involvement, may be direct influences and contributing factors or they may simply be general indicators of issues within a youth's life that may place them at risk. The whole set of risk factors form a composite of attitudes, influences, opportunities in the life of a youth.

**Protective factors** are attributes that are associated with making the decision not to join a gang. They may not prevent a youth from joining, but they indicate that there may be individual, social, physical, and environmental conditions present that support their choice not to join a gang - they may see other opportunities as being more favourable.

Review the following websites for information on risk factors and protective factors related to youth becoming involved in a gangs. Each source may cite a different set of risks – make sure you collect and compare several lists. Compile your list on the Character Profile: Risk and Protective Factors Table

1)	Public Safety Canada, <i>Youth Gang Involvement: What are the risk factors?</i> <a href="http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/bldngevd/2007-yg-2-en.asp">http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/bldngevd/2007-yg-2-en.asp</a>
2)	Edmonton Police Service, <i>Traits of Gang Members</i> <a href="http://www.edmontonpolice.ca/CommunityPolicing/OrganizedCrime/Gangs/TraitsofGangMembers.aspx">http://www.edmontonpolice.ca/CommunityPolicing/OrganizedCrime/Gangs/TraitsofGangMembers.aspx</a>
3)	Winnipeg Police Service, <i>TakeAction in Schools, Gang Awareness Resource</i> <a href="http://www.winnipeg.ca/police/pdfs/takeactionschools/gangawareresource.pdf">http://www.winnipeg.ca/police/pdfs/takeactionschools/gangawareresource.pdf</a> See the risk factors on page 2
4)	Nova Scotia Justice, <i>Gang Preventions; A Resource Guide on Youth and Gangs</i> <a href="http://www.gov.ns.ca/just/publications/documents/GangPrevention.pdf">http://www.gov.ns.ca/just/publications/documents/GangPrevention.pdf</a> See page 6 (pdf 7), General Risk Factors
5)	Community Solutions To Gang Violence, <i>Resources:Gangs</i> <a href="http://www.csgv.ca/content.php?ID=54">http://www.csgv.ca/content.php?ID=54</a> There are a number of resources to gather information from on this section of this website
6)	Youth Gangs: An Overview, <i>Juvenile Justice Bulletin</i> , August 1998 <a href="http://www.ojdp.ncjrs.gov/jjbulletin/9808/chart.html">http://www.ojdp.ncjrs.gov/jjbulletin/9808/chart.html</a>
7)	add any other resources or websites used here:
8)	

# Character Profile: Risks and Protective Factors Table

Use this page to record your findings. Cite your sources using the reference numbers from the previous page.

Risk Factors	Protective Factors

Once you have collected a comprehensive list of factors from several sources, circle, highlight or place a check mark next to the factors that apply to your character in order to assess their risk.

# Character Profile: Analysis and Referral

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## Follow up:

1) Once you have collected a comprehensive list of factors from several sources, circle, highlight or place a check mark next to the factors that apply to your character. Use your **Character Profile: Intake** worksheet to help with your assessment.

2) Based on your **Character Profile: Intake** character analysis and the above risk assessment, what factors do you think made the greatest contribution to your character becoming involved in their gang or gang-like behaviour? Explain and defend your reasons.

3) Identify and research organizations and services in your community that could have assisted your character with these issues, and contributed to the the youth making the decision not to join the gang or contributed to the youth making the transition out of gang involvement.

Organization or Service	Contact information	Supports the organization or service provides

# Potential Risk Factors: Teacher Page

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There is not a unified set of factors that indicate a youth will become a gang member, however there are a number of associated risk factors. Many of these risks relate to environmental factors, internal factors, and unique personal experiences often associated with isolation or alienation of the youth:

- They may have a disconnected or troubled relationship with their family.  
(i.e. divorce, neglect, abuse, abandonment, lack of supervision or lack of parental involvement)
- They may not identify with a particular peer group or may be excluded by their peer group.  
(i.e. the youth is bullied, a bully, isolated from their peer group, or the youth is seeking a peer support group they can identify with)
- They may not be connected to or have a sense of belonging to their community and are not involved in community recreational activities.  
(i.e. They do not participate in sports or other community recreational activities, these activities may not exist or be accessible within the community, or they are not involved in their community cultural or religious activities)
- They may feel ethnically, culturally, or linguistically isolated.  
(Culture and language groups vary from community to community. Some culture or language groups may be socially separated from the broader community or mainstream/predominant culture due to language barriers, religious belief, or for historical reasons. This may mean that some new immigrant communities may be a risk while others may not – local and individual factors play a role and each community situation is unique. Many communities have gang problems that predominantly involve members of the mainstream/predominant ethnic, cultural and language groups – in these cases the youth may feel disconnected somehow from that mainstream culture group).
- They may not be connected to or have a sense of belonging to their school and may have learning difficulties or perform poorly at school. (Students with learning difficulties are at higher risk as they may experience academic and social challenges which lead to a negative schooling experience or which impact their world view. Some students may not connect with narrowly focused school activities which may not fit their personal interests, or they may not identify with a mentor in the school who makes them feel like they belong, even if they want to be seen as a stand-out and unique individual)
- Some may come from aggressive or violent environments and in turn may seek ways of expressing themselves aggressively or violently. (Many gang members experience or witness violence and abuse at home – this abuse may be verbal, psychological or physical. Some students may be at risk if they have grown up in a culture of violence due to war, civil conflict, or other reasons. Some individuals come to view violence as a normal or acceptable way of interacting in the world as a result of their experiences.)
- Youth who use drugs or alcohol or have prior criminal involvement are also at greater risk. (Drugs and alcohol may be used as a means of dealing with adverse situations, stress, relationships or as a means of escape. Gangs may be an additional source of support or a source of drugs. Criminal involvement may lead to developing relationships or contacts with others who have been criminally involved through informal or formal networking.)
- Finances can be a factor as youth may see gang membership as a means of stepping out of a bad financial situation or as a means of being financially successful. (Financial pressure rather than poverty is the issue. Crime may be seen as the only accessible means of attaining financial goals or needs. Needs may range from basic survival needs to materialist needs - cars, technology, clothes)
- The simple presence of gangs in the community or through the youth's social or family connections is also a risk factor. (It is difficult to join a gang if there isn't one near by to join. If there is a gang on the corner and a community recreation program 1km away, the gang is more mentally and physically accessible. If a family member is in a gang, joining a gang may seem like a very normal thing to do.)
- Personal and developmental factors including poor motivation, low self-esteem and held moral values, attitudes and beliefs that justify violence and criminal behaviour. (These may relate to personally held beliefs, psychological issues, developmental issues, or issues related to any of the above risk factors)