

Characters, Characterization, and Motivation

Chapter 2 Notes / 8th Grade ELA



What is a character?

What is character?

A *character* is simply a person, animal, or other self-aware being in a narrative — whether the narrative is written, on film, or received on your radio, television, or computer.

However, the word *character* can also be used to mean a person's nature or basic personality. For example, someone who is kind, honest, and who states his or her true beliefs and who follows through on what he or she promises to do can be described as being a person of honor and integrity, or as having good character.



What is a character?



Put another way ...

Goofy is a Disney character ...

What is character?

And Goofy's character is a little goofy!



What is characterization?



Characterization is (1) the way a writer reveals (shows or demonstrates) an individual's character (nature or basic personality), or (2) reveals the personality of a character (a person or other being in a story).

Whichever way one chooses to remember it, the essential idea is the same: the author reveals or shows something about the character or personality of an individual in the story — and the way the author reveals or shows that personality or basic nature is called *characterization*.

But does
characterization
actually matter?

Absolutely! DreamWorks turned a jackass into a superstar in *Shrek*, and Disney turned an old, worn-out cowboy doll into a hero in *Toy Story* ...

Good characterization can bring to life even the most ordinary, uninspiring people or creatures. On the other hand, *poor characterization* can make even the most remarkable person or creature seem dull and uninteresting.



There are
two kinds of
characterization.



Direct characterization occurs when the author simply and directly tells the reader about a character's (individual's) personality or basic nature. The reader is not asked to make a judgment, but rather to accept what the author writes.

"No one ever said that Melinda Alice was nice. That wasn't the word used. No, she was clever, even witty. She was called — never to her face, however — Melinda Malice. *Melinda Alice was clever and cruel.*"

Those Three Wishes
Judith Gorong

Holt Literature and Language Arts, pg. 73

There are two kinds of characterization.



Indirect characterization occurs when the author describes the acts, words, thoughts, feelings, or appearance of a character, or describes how other characters in the story react to him or her — leaving the reader to judge for himself or herself what kind of personality or personality traits the individual possesses (the “character” of the individual).

- appearance
- character's actions
- character's words
- character's thoughts and feelings
- reactions of others to the character



A caution about characterization:



Remember, direct or indirect, when we use the word characterization, we are talking about how the author reveals the kind of character, character traits, personality, or personality traits possessed by an individual character in a story.

And when we talk about character or personality traits we are talking about the way a character usually acts, thinks, or feels — we are not talking about a temporary state of mind, or a temporary emotional outburst, or a temporary feeling or action.

What is
a motive?

What is
motivation?

Whether one uses *motive* or *motivation*, the idea is the same: a character's motive or motivation is nothing more than why a character does whatever he or she does — it is the reason or reasons for a character's behavior.

Motives can be selfish or selfless, the results of circumstances or challenges, or the results of the behavior of others.

Often you will need to infer a motive; if, however, you do make an inference about a motive or motives, make sure you can cite evidence for your claim.

