
Chapter 2: Characters — Doing the Right Thing

Narratives always have *characters*, and those characters come in all shapes, colors, and sizes — from people to animals ... and even some rather unusual beings like the Ghost of Christmas Present from Dickens' A Christmas Carol, the small, child-like alien from E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial, or Optimus Prime from Transformers.

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

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.

- The word *character* can also refer to one's basic nature or personality.

Characterization is (1) the way a writer reveals (shows or demonstrates) 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. Good characterization will make a character come to life; poor characterization will make even the most remarkable individual seem boring.

- *Characterization* is the way the writer shows the reader the personality or basic nature of a character.

Direct characterization is when the writer simply and directly tells the reader about an individual's personality or basic nature; the reader is not asked to make a judgment based on evidence, but rather to accept what the author writes.

Indirect characterization occurs when the author lets the reader decide or make judgments about the personality (basic nature or character) of an individual in the story by showing the reader the character (individual) in action. In other words, the author provides evidence and the reader determines the personality or character of the individual in the story based on that evidence.

- **Direct Characterization:** When the author tells the reader directly what kind of personality a character has or directly identifies the personality traits of a character.
- **Indirect Characterization:** When the author describes the acts, thoughts, feelings, or appearance of a character, or describes how other characters in the story react to him or her. This means the reader must decide for himself or herself what kind of personality or personality traits the character possesses.

Characterization that is indirect is revealed in the following ways: the character's appearance, the character's actions, the character's own words, the character's own thoughts and feelings, and how others react to or say about the character.

Of course, many different character **traits** go into or make up a single personality. For example, the hero of a story might be wise, brave, and funny, but a little conceited — having all four traits at the same time. Whatever the trait, it must express the way an individual or character usually acts, thinks, or feels — the way he or she usually is: a personality or character trait is NOT a temporary feeling. For instance, a person who is optimistic can, at times, be a little sad, or a normally friendly person can have a bad day — the temporary condition in either case does NOT change the basic personality or specific character trait. The optimistic person is still optimistic and the friendly person is still friendly.

- A personality **trait** represents the way a character usually acts, thinks, or feels — it is NOT a temporary state of being or a temporary emotional outburst or a temporary feeling or action.

Other Important Chapter 2 Concepts

The reason or reasons a character behaves in a certain way is called *motivation*. When reading a narrative or biography the reader must often *infer* a motive or *motives* by examining carefully a character's actions, words, or how others react to the character.

Inferences are conclusions based on information that has been given. It is to begin to believe or have an opinion that something is probably true because of information one has learned. When a reader *infers* (v) he or she makes *inferences* (n).

Irony occurs when we notice that something is the opposite of what we think it should be. For example, it would be *ironic* if the fire station burned down or the police chief's son was arrested for burglary.

An *allusion* is a reference to a statement, a person, a place, or an event from literature, the arts, history, religion, mythology, politics, sports, or science.

Subjective writing reveals the feelings and attitudes of the writer. *Objective writing* is based completely on the facts.

Writing that is *biased* gives only one side of a subject and therefore presents an incomplete picture or view of that subject.

Primary sources are firsthand accounts of events, people, places, or things. For example, if one wanted to know what happened during the Constitutional Convention, then he or she would read the "minutes" of the meetings that were held. ("Minutes" are the official, written record of what happens at a meeting, and the record is written by someone who is at the meeting and given the responsibility to write down what happens while it is happening.)

When the treatment of a subject covers many aspects of the topic, the treatment is *broad* in *scope*. When the treatment covers only a very few aspects of the topic, the treatment is *narrow* in *scope*.

When you *summarize*, you mention and explain only the most important ideas of a work. In other words, you will focus on the main ideas and key details.

When you *paraphrase*, you restate the entire text *in your own words*. Because of this, paraphrase is always longer than a summary.

Kinds of Text Structure

Enumeration: explaining things as first, second, third, and so on; 1, 2, 3, and so on; a, b, c, and so on.

Chronology: describing events in the order in which they happen or happened. (We went to the store and then we went to get something to eat, after which we went to the park.)

Compare and Contrast: showing how two or more things are similar and/or different.

Cause and effect: showing how one event causes another event.

Spatial order shows where things are located.

Some Kinds of Texts

Biography: An account of a person's life, or part of it, written or told by another person.

Autobiography: A person's account of his or her own life, or part of it.