

Characterization Concept Hand-out

Definition of characterization—the methods by which an author develops, or “writes,” character traits.

Types of Characterization—**Direct/Indirect**

- Direct characterization is when the author states directly the character trait. Example: John has brown hair.
- Indirect characterization is when the author shows the character trait through description or figurative language. Example: John’s hair is the color of chestnuts in the autumn sunlight.

Methods of Characterization—things that illustrate what type of person the character is...

- Physical characteristics
- Thoughts
- Speech
- Actions
- Reactions to and from other characters

Influences on Character—things that may influence character traits and further characterization...

- Background—family, class, experience, lifestyle, heritage & traditions, education...
- Social—religion, race, education, employment, political affiliations...
- Environment—relationship between character and setting, and how the character acts in various settings...
- Motivation—something that creates a need and therefore causes action—why a character does what s/he does. One easy way to begin to look at motivation is to realize that everyone loves, fears, hopes for, and has lost something/someone—often these are motivational agents.

Literary Form of Characters

- Protagonist—the main character of the story who is faced by challenges and experiences conflicts as the plot progresses.
- Antagonist—the opposing character(s) to the protagonist who challenges him or her as the plot progresses.
- Major Character(s)—those who are continuously involved in the action of the plot. Major characters change, to varying degrees, over the course of the story. Major characters influence and are influenced by other characters and events.
- Minor Character(s)—those who are woven into the story here and there, but are not involved in all of the main events and action in the plot; minor

characters change very little if at all, and mainly function to create change in others or complicate/resolve conflict.

- **Background Characters**—those who are necessary to create plausibility in a scene, but do not take part in any events. Example: If a major/minor character stops for gas, there must be a gas station attendant, but that person really isn't a character in the story.
- **Round/Flat**—Round characters are richly characterized and developed; they have many traits. Flat characters have few traits. Characters can be somewhere in-between; rather, it is possible to analyze the degree of roundness or flatness.
- **Dynamic/Static**—Dynamic characters change through the course of events in the plot; static characters do not. As with degrees of roundness/flatness, characters can be dynamic to varying degrees.

Literary Function or Purpose of Characters—how they impact the story

- **Archetype**—a universal pattern of human behavior that can be represented by a character. Example: Odysseus is the archetype of a hero.
- **Personify Ideas**—a character's traits can represent an idea. Example: Odysseus personifies the idea of persistence.
- **Narrator**—a character can be the narrator of the story.
- **Narrator Agent**—a character can take control of the narration (telling) of the story. One example of this is during an internal monologue.
- **Viewpoint Character**—the perspective of the story is from this character's view, so the reader holds much the same perspective as the character, and sort of walks through the story with this character.
- **Plot Progression**—the way characters act or react to situations in the story cause the plot to progress.