

## Characterization English 10



### Definition of Characterization

Characters in a story may be like people we know or different from any one we know. One of the writer's job is to make the personalities of the characters clear and believable to the reader. The process by which he does this is called characterization. Therefore, characterization is *the process by which a writer presents the personal traits of characters in a story*. Everything that a writer does to portray characters is part of characterization.

Writers have two ways that they may portray their characters in a story :**direct presentation and indirect presentation**. Sometimes the writer lets his narrator tells us **directly** what a character is like. For example, he tells us that Jim is "naturally bossy and vain. " In this instance, we do not have to 'interpret' about his bossiness or vanity (it is part of his character). Sometimes , the writer reveals character **indirectly** by showing the person in action interacting with other characters and then letting us draw (infer) our own conclusions about what the character is like -that is, we are forced to interpret the main qualities of that character. For example, in a short story the main character has changed his name from the Nerd to Zeus; from his name we can infer that Zeus sees himself as godlike and powerful (Zeus was the head of the Greek gods famous for his power and rage).

Whether it been **direct or indirect presentation**, writers commonly use five methods in characterization:

1. they show their characters in action
2. they have the characters speak (usually in the form of dialogue *-conversation between two or more persons*) and have the characters think  
-people tend to reveal themselves through the way they talk and the things they talk about as well as what they are thinking about
3. they give a physical description of the character
4. they tell how others react to the characters
5. they state directly what the characters are like (usually the most ineffective)

### Methods of Characterization

<b>Direct</b> characterization is told through direct statements made by the author-narrator	<b>Indirect</b> characterization is shown through actions, dialogue, and other characters
<p>-from the narrator's statement about a character (Zeus was both clever and powerful.)</p> <p>-first person is never considered to be direct characterization</p>	<p>- from what a character says or thinks</p> <p>-from what a character says or thinks about another character</p> <p>-from what a character thinks about himself, others, or the world</p> <p>-from what a character does</p> <p>-from a character's reactions to people or things</p>

\*Direct presentation does not occur in first person narration (since the narrator is a character in the story, the reader can not assume what the character is saying is true or not).

## Type of Characters

1. **Dramatis Personae** -all characters in a play or story  
-the characters may be human or non-human
2. **Main Characters and Supporting Characters -characters by function**  
-in most short stories, if the conflict is external, the main characters are the protagonist and antagonist; if internal, then there is at least one main character  
-main characters help move the action forward  
-all other characters that support the development of the plot are called minor or supporting characters  
-in more complex stories there may be several main characters

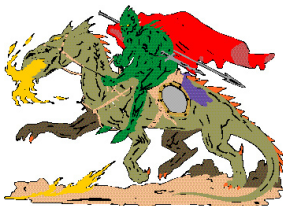
3. **Specific Types of Characters**



- a. **Archetype** -an original character type that occurs frequently in literature, myth, and religion believed to evoke profound emotions because that character touches the unconscious memory (universal in nature)  
-(an original model or pattern from which copies are made and used over and over in literature)  
-common archetypes include the hero, epic hero, Prometheus, the messiah, Lucifer, the Oedipus type



- b. **Stereotypes** (character type that has been used so often in literature that it is recognized at once by the reader often referred to a cliches) -stereotype originally referred to the using of a fixed image to describe a person, group, or event (to create a fixed, conventional image, as if cast from a mould)  
-stereotypes were often racist in nature (such as the stupid blackman or greedy Jew) or sexist (dumb blond)  
-lack individuality because they are standard types that always behave in the same expected way  
-often become stock characters



- c. **Stock Characters** (a character type that is immediately recognized and predictable because it has been used so often in literature)  
-often used to make fun or as foil to other characters in the play  
-examples include the absent-minded professor, the evil scientist, the bratty, brainy child, the Marilyn Monroe type, the tough private detective with the heart of gold, the Sherlock Holmes type, the ruthless gangster with the cigar in his mouth, the henpecked husband, the disguised romantic heroine, the cruel step-mother, prince charming  
-writers tend to avoid the use of stock characters unless they want to satirize them (writing that ridicules human beings/institutions for their weaknesses, peculiarities, vices, or failures)  
-used extensively in the theatre to condense character description and speed plot

4. **Character Foil**

Foil is literally a 'leaf' of bright metal placed under a jewel to increase its 'brilliance'; in literature, the term has come to mean any person who through contrast emphasizes the distinctive characteristics of another character. That is, the foil (character) is used as a contrast to the main

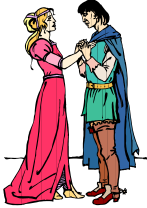


character emphasizing differences in the main character's qualities. In the Cinderella fairy tale, the step-sisters are foils to Cinderella.

### What the Reader Learns About Characters

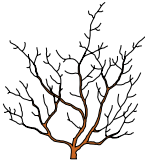
-as the reader reads the story we learn different qualities about the characters:

#### 1. How Well are the Characters Developed in the Story



- some characters need to be described in great detail while others need very little description
- if a character is developed only a little and can be described in only one or two sentences, he is described as a **flat character**
- if a character is well developed and he can be described in several sentences, he is described as a **round character**
- \*even main characters may be described as flat characters

#### 2. To What Degree Do Characters Change in the Story



- some characters make no change at all in the story while others may gain important insight into their lives and thus are able to make a significant change
- characters who do not change significantly are described as **static characters**
- characters who make a fundamental change in their life are described as **dynamic characters**

-effective stories may use all types of characters

- the most important character is usually round and dynamic; most minor characters are flat and static (usually there is no time or space to describe these characters as real people)
- the amount of characterization that a character receives is generally determined by the character's role and function in the story

### Character Story

- a story in which character is more important than action
- there is a plot in this kind of story, but the events are important only because of what they reveal about the character

### What Determines Good Characterization

- in presenting characters, the writer must be careful to make the characters effective
- that is, the characters must be believable (true to life)
- the language a character uses must be the kind that a person with the same background, living in the same environment, and of the same age would use in actual life
- the actions of the characters must be true to life (if their actions are not what the reader would expect from a real person, the reader finds it difficult to believe the story) -the characters, therefore, need to be appropriately motivated

-thus to have effective characterization the writer must make the characters

1. plausible (believable)
2. consistent
3. appropriately motivated



## **Terms Related to Character**

**characterization**  
**direct presentation**  
**indirection presentation**  
**dialogue**  
**monologue**  
**main character**  
**supporting character**  
**archetype/cliche**  
    **epic hero**  
    **tragic hero**  
    **messiah**  
    **buffoon**  
    **antihero**  
**stereotype**  
**stock character**  
**character foil**  
**flat character**  
**round character**  
**static character**  
**dynamic character**  
**elements of good characterization**  
    **plausibility**  
    **consistency**  
    **appropriate motivation**  
**stream of consciousness**

