

## Creating Fictional Characters

*How are fictional characters developed in a story?*

**Grades 9-12 Lesson:** Creating Characters

**Grade Band:** 9-12

**Arts Subject:** Theater, Literary Arts, English & Literature

**Other Subject:** English, Writing

### SUMMARY

In this 9-12 lesson, students will examine character as a significant element of fictional stories. They will learn methods of characterization, identify supporting details, and critique these methods in well-known works of fiction. Students will demonstrate methods of characterization through dialogue and a point of view quick write.

### PREPARATION

#### Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Define, examine, analyze, and evaluate character as an element of fiction writing.
- Define and identify characterization, dialogue, and point of view in works of fiction.
- Incorporate characterization, dialogue, and point of view in their own writing.
- Write for a variety of audiences: peers, teachers, parents, school-wide community, and beyond.

### Recommended Materials

**Editable Documents:** *Before sharing these resources with students, you must first save them to your Google account by opening them, and selecting “Make a copy” from the File menu.*

- [Revealing a Character: An Example](#)
- [Methods of Characterization](#)
- [Fiction Terms: Creating Characters](#)

### Additional Materials

- 1:1 computers, magazines (optional), literature excerpts

### Teacher Background

Teachers should have knowledge of literary elements and be able to support students in grasping multiple concepts to create believable characters. Encourage them to have patience with the process. Visit [teachingcomics](#) for characterization resources.

## Student Prerequisites

Students should know basic vocabulary and concepts of fiction writing, including:

- Definition and categories within fiction (short story, novel, novella, etc.)
- Familiarity with literary elements of fiction: setting, characters, plot, setting, conflict, climax, and resolution

## Accessibility Notes

Modify handouts as needed and allow extra time for task completion. Utilize assistive technologies to support students during the writing process.

## INSTRUCTION

### Engage

**1. Draw a large stick figure on the board.** Draw arrows from its head, mouth, heart, and body. Label the head “thoughts” (expressed through a particular point of view), label the mouth “speech” (dialogue), label the heart “emotions,” and label the body “physical descriptions and actions.”

**2. Explain that characters are often similar to human beings in the real world.** A character is a person (or sometimes an animal) who takes part in the action of a work of literature. Generally, the plot of a short story focuses on one character—called the main character. A story may also have one or more minor characters. They keep the action moving forward and help the reader learn more about the main character.

**3. Explain that typically, not all character traits are revealed at the same time.** Clues about the character are given to the reader throughout the story. However, it may be necessary to give a short sketch of your main character at or near the beginning of the story. Characters are defined in a variety of ways through thoughts and emotions, dialogue, actions, and physical descriptions. Explain that authors use these elements to make characters believable.

**4. Review the handout [Revealing a Character: An Example](#).** Have students read the passage in which all four techniques are used to characterize a girl named Kelly who is visiting Sally O'Brien, her best friend. In the passage, Mrs. O'Brien is Sally's grandmother. Show the students the following statements, and have them point out the lines from the excerpt that prove each statement and name the methods of characterization used.

- Kelly has a ponytail.
- Kelly thinks that Mrs. O'Brien has a sour face.
- Kelly is concerned about Sally.
- Sally's mother was nice to Kelly.

**5. Review and discuss the following [Fiction Terms: Creating Characters](#).**

**6. Share the [Methods of Characterization](#) organizer.** Have students complete the organizer by choosing a photograph of a person or animal (or another image they'd like to personify) from the web or a magazine and provide 2-3 details for each method of description listed on the chart. The physical description of the character is clear, but it is up to the student to decide which details they would like to reveal to the reader.

**7. Ask students to share their character and characterization details with the class.** Ask students to explain their choices. Discuss details that reveal character traits effectively. Give feedback about details that might benefit from sharper descriptions.

### **Build**

**1. Pass out excerpts of several works of literature that illustrate each method of characterization.** Lead a shared reading of the excerpts. Identify the information that can be gathered about the characters. Discuss how the writers use characterization as a literary technique and how point of view impacts the story. Evaluate the success of the characterizations. Ask students to note what they like and dislike about each excerpt/technique.

**2. Ask students the following discussion questions:** Think about the characters in some of your favorite books. *What qualities did these characters have that attracted you to them? How did the author express those qualities? Have you ever read a book that did not have interesting characters? How did this affect your view of the book?*

**3. Divide the class into small groups and give each group a list of character traits.** Have each group create a character who illustrates its list of traits without using the actual adjectives. Then have each group read its characterization aloud so other students can attempt to determine which adjectives the character exemplifies. If time allows, try a variation of this activity. Give every group a list of the same adjectives; the class could then analyze different ways to illustrate the same character traits.

### **Apply**

**1. Pair students up to collaborate on the [Characterization Quick Write](#).** Have students select one writing exercise to which they respond.

**2. Help students better understand dialogue. Share and discuss the [Writing Dialogue](#) guidelines and the choices from the [Dialogue Quick Write](#).** Students should complete one of the writing assignments outlined in the handout.

**3. Have a discussion with the class.** Ask, *how do elements of dialogue reveal information about a character?*

**4. Help students better understand the point of view. Have students complete one of the writing topics from the [Point of View Quick Write](#).**

### **Reflect**

**1. Assess students' knowledge of literary elements and techniques when creating a character. Use the following short story prompt:** *Write a short story that employs each device used in characterization. Include different methods of characterization, including dialogue, to develop characters and plot. The point of view of the short story should be clear and consistent.*

### **Credits**

Original Writer, Kathy Cook

Adaptation, Andria Cole

Editor, JoDee Scissors