

CHARACTERISATION

How to study a character.

Context

You will need to write about characters in novels and in plays during your KS4 course. You will be expected to be able to look closely at how the author or playwright has created the character. The writer uses lots of different ways of creating character – this is called **characterisation**. You can use this homework to help you develop your skills when writing about *any* character in literature.

Objective

To understand characterisation and know what to look for when studying a character.

Key Vocabulary

Character = a person in a novel or play or other literary work.

Characterisation = the way in which a character is created.

What you need to do

1. Read the help sheet ('How to study a character – Introduction') on the next page. You must do this before you do the task.
2. Choose either task A, B or C. You need to answer the questions once you have read the paragraph.

You can choose whether to do task A ('Of Mice and Men' with extra help), task B ('Of Mice and Men' without help) or task C (.). Only do A you find B too difficult. Only do task C if you find B too easy.

HOW TO STUDY A CHARACTER – INTRODUCTION

Characterisation is the way a writer creates a character, the methods used to paint a clear picture for the reader. If you can really imagine the character in a story, it is probably because the writer is very good at characterisation.

Characterisation includes lots of different things:

- **1. What does he or she look like?**

Sometimes the author will describe the physical appearance of the character. Look out for what the character dresses like. What does the author choose to pick out and why?

- **2. Where does he or she live/what is his or her setting?**

Often where we are first introduced to a character is important. The author may be wanting us to think about the setting being linked to the character. What does the setting tell us about the character's personality?

- **3. What does he or she say?**

Dialogue and speech are very important. We can find out about the character not only by what he or she says but how it is said, e.g. angrily. Remember that sometimes the writer might not want us to believe what the character is saying.

- **4. What does he or she think?**

Sometimes the writer tells us what the character thinks and sometimes the writer shows us by the way he or she reacts to something.

- **5. What is he or she called?**

Sometimes the writer has very carefully chosen the name of the character to show us what he or she is like. What does his or her name make you think of? Sometimes this is done as an anagram.

- **6. What does she or he do?**

The way the character does things is very important. Rather than telling you a character is angry, the writer might show you by the way he or she is behaving.

- **7. What language/images are used when describing the character?**

The writer can use complex or simple language to give us a clue about the character. Also, the writer might keep using similar images that we begin to link with the character.

TASK A with extra help

passage is taken from 'Of Mice and Men'. Crooks is a black character. When the novel was written and set, in 1930s USA, black people were not treated fairly or equally. This is the first time we are introduced to Crooks who lives in a stable barn away from the other men on the ranch.

This room was swept and fairly neat, for Crooks was a proud, aloof man. He kept his distance and demanded that other people kept theirs. His body was bent over to the left by his crooked spine, and his eyes lay deep in his head, and because of their depth seemed to glitter with intensity. His lean face was lined with deep black wrinkles, and he had thin, pain-tightened lips which were lighter than his face.

Comment [j1]: This means he keeps his distance. He does not get involved.

Comment [j2]: This is a metaphor. It helps us to imagine Crooks is a deep, thoughtful and serious character.

Comment [j3]: Notice how many times the writer uses 'deep'.

Read the paragraph above and answer these questions (write out the beginning of the answer in red and finish it with your own ideas. The notes in blue might help you):

1. What does the room tell us about Crooks?

The room is 'swept and fairly neat' which makes me think that Crooks is...
A neat and tidy room suggests that Crooks is tidy and organised. He is a proud man who does not want people to think he is dirty or untidy. He cares about where he lives.

2. Why is he called Crooks?

The writer has called the character Crooks because...
We are told that Crooks has a 'crooked spine'. We are meant to feel sorry for Crooks because of his disability. It is important that we know that he is treated differently because of his colour and his disability.

3. What sort of eyes does Crooks have?

Crooks has 'eyes deep in his head'. This makes me think that Crooks is...
Having deep eyes might make us think that Crooks is a thoughtful character, who has to think deeply about things. He is alone and has lots of time to think about life and how he has been treated.

4. What sort of lips does Crooks have?

Crooks has 'pain-tightened lips'. This makes me think that Crooks is...
Crooks has suffered because he is black. Others on the ranch are racist. Crooks is probably not allowed to say what he really thinks; he has to keep his lips shut. He is in pain because he isn't allowed to say what he thinks and because he is treated badly.

TASK B

This passage is taken from 'Of Mice and Men'. Crooks is a black character. When the novel was written and set, in 1930s USA, black people were not treated fairly or equally. This is the first time we are introduced to Crooks who lives in a stable barn away from the other men on the ranch.

This room was swept and fairly neat, for Crooks was a proud, aloof man. He kept his distance and demanded that other people kept theirs. His body was bent over to the left by his crooked spine, and his eyes lay deep in his head, and because of their depth seemed to glitter with intensity. His lean face was lined with deep black wrinkles, and he had thin, pain-tightened lips which were lighter than his face.

Read the paragraph above and answer the following questions:

1. What can we learn about the character from the setting?
2. Why has the author given the character the name 'Crooks'?
3. Why do you think that Crooks 'demanded that other people kept their distance'?
4. What can we learn about the character from the description of his eyes?
5. What can we learn about the character from the description of his lips?
6. Steinbeck, the author, uses the word 'deep' or 'depth' three times in this paragraph. What can we learn about the character from this use of language?
7. Steinbeck uses the metaphor 'glitter with intensity'. What can we learn about the character from this use of imagery?

TASK C

This is an extract from 'Pride and Prejudice', a novel written by Jane Austen in the 19th century. Here we are introduced for the first time to Mr Collins, a clergyman visiting the Bennet family.

Mr Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of Nature had been but little assisted by education or society; the greatest part of his life having been spent under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly father; and though he belonged to one of the universities, he had merely kept the necessary terms, without forming at it any useful acquaintance. The subjection in which his father had brought him up had given him originally great humility of manner, but it was now a good deal counteracted by the self-conceit of a weak head, living in retirement, and the consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity. A fortunate chance had recommended him to Lady Catherine de Bourgh when the living of Hunsford was vacant; and the respect with which he felt for her high rank, and his veneration for her as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his rights as a rector made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility.

Read the above paragraph and answer the following questions:

1. Austen does not tell us much about his appearance, yet we can guess how he looks. How has she achieved this?
2. Austen introduces him as 'not a sensible man'. Why do you think that she does this?
3. What do we learn about the character from the background information Austen gives us?
4. Do you think that we are meant to either like or sympathise with Mr Collins? Explain your answer.