



# Character and Characterization

In narrative works or in a drama the persons who are presented are characters. In most pieces of fiction, one or two characters predominate and the action revolves around them. The central character in fiction is the protagonist and the major character or force that opposes the central character is the antagonist.

Character refers to not only the fictional person but also their qualities. These qualities are an integral part of defining their character. A careful examination of a character's morals, disposition, and behavior must be done in order to gain a full understanding of the character. To determine the nature of a character, consider:

- ❏ How does the character behave?
- ❏ What does the character choose to do or choose not to do?
- ❏ What motivates a character?
- ❏ What do others say about the character?
- ❏ What does the character say?
- ❏ Does the character change? If the protagonist is essentially the same at the end of the story as at the beginning even though circumstances have changed, what aspect of the protagonist's character determined the direction of the protagonist's life?
- ❏ How does the protagonist deal with the antagonist?
- ❏ What internal conflicts, if any, does the protagonist experience?

## Classification of Character

A **flat character** is a minor character who is easily defined as they have only one quality.

A **round character** is a complex individual who has many evident qualities, therefore making them more difficult to define.

A stock character is an individual who is stereotyped.

A **character foil** is any character whose nature, actions, or motivations serve to emphasize or highlight the nature, actions, or motivations of another character.

A **dynamic or developing character**, often the protagonist, is one that undergoes an essential change throughout the fiction.

A **static character**, on the other hand, does not change in the course of the literature.

## Characterization

The way in which an author reveals character is known as characterization. Two methods that are distinguished are:

### Direct Characterization

The author explicitly tells the reader or has one of the characters tell the reader what a certain character is about.

### Indirect Characterization

The author suggests what a character is like through what he thinks, says, does, or does not do. This is usually the more convincing method of character presentation and challenges the reader to infer what a character is like.

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## "Character": Disentangling some different senses.

The word "character" derives from the Greek verb *charassein*, meaning to mark with a cut or furrow. It came to be used for writing with a stylus in wet clay (as in cuniform script) or engraving on a stone surface. Hence Greek term *charakter* for the distinctive mark thus made - a sense still with us in the idea of a "character" as a letter, a repeatable figure recognizable as such. From this comes the idea of "character" as a "stable nature" or "type," the notion from which a host of others have differentiated.

In ordinary discourse, the term "character" can take on any of a variety of meanings, depending on the context in which it happens to be used. Consider the difference between the expressions "he's a real character" and "he has real character." Both point to something remarkable about the person in question. But the kind of thing that has struck the speaker's attention is different.

- The second directs our attention to the person's ethical qualities and declares these to be virtues, i.e., worthy of admiration: the individual so described is steadfast and reliable. In fact, it is derived from still a third sense common in current speech, in which "character" means "one's ethically relevant traits," i.e., the collection of a person's virtues and vices.
- The first suggests that the person has a very special way of doing things, perhaps even to the point of eccentricity. We can be invited to look upon the person with anything ranging from amused wonder to consternation or suspicion. Depending on the particular facts of the case, "he's a character" can mean "he's a funny fellow" or "a simple case" or "a strange bird" or "doubtful sort." This is the sort of thing that in German would be said "*Er ist ein Typ*" and which sometimes but not always gets spelled out more explicitly: *Er ist ein komischer Typ* or *ein bekackter Typ* or *ein merkwürdiger Typ* or *ein fragwürdiger Typ*. French and Spanish, too, prefer *type* and *tipo*, respectively, for this commodious sense of "character" in English.