

Literary Skillsmaster 5

Characterization, Part 1

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Interesting, believable characters are an essential part of any good story. To create such characters, an author can use a variety of methods.

Study these methods and examples before going on to the activity.

1. **Describing physical appearance**—Embedded in Ma Diller's fat, fleshy face were two tiny, raisin-like eyes.
2. **The actions of the character**—Scratching at herself, Ma searched the cupboard for something to eat.
3. **The thoughts of the character**—*I think I'll sleep all day again*, decided Ma.
4. **What the character says**—"You rotten kids get in here, or I'll come and whomp you with my broom!" screamed Ma from the doorway.
5. **What others say to or about the character**—"Ma is the laziest old woman in the world," the boy sneered.

6. **What others do to the character**—Under the kitchen table, Elmer gleefully tied the laces of Ma's work boots together.

7. **The setting in which the character is found**—The whole place was a mess, particularly the front yard, which was littered with trash and old furniture. Asleep on a rotting old sofa lay the snoring bulk of Ma Diller.

8. **The author explains what the character is like**—For Ma, breathing in and out was a big job in itself and anything beyond that, impossible.

DIRECTIONS: Read the excerpts below. Then, in the space following each, identify the method the author uses to reveal character. (Each of the methods described above is used once.)

A. "Why doesn't anybody like me?" Purvis asked the man. _____

B. Chris grabbed Purvis' greasy hair and pulled him backward out of his seat. _____

C. In Purvis' bedroom were dozens of cages and boxes filled with snakes, many of them poisonous. _____

D. Purvis had a tiny head crowned by a greasy mass of curly hair. _____

E. "What are you eating, ugly?" Purvis heard someone behind him say. _____

F. Purvis was an odd boy, a strange and repulsive creature doomed to lead a private, friendless existence. _____

G. Purvis walked into the closet, shut the door, and began talking to one of his many imaginary friends. _____

H. I wish I were a snake, thought Purvis. _____
