

Character

By a character we understand a person in a fictional text that is developed through name, action, description (physical/outward appearance), traits of character (attitudes, moral ideas, judgements, temperament), social background (status/position), language and way of speaking. So not every human being appearing in a text is really to be called a character.

We speak of round, flat and stock characters.

A round character is one who develops in the course of the text, and therefore changes his or her attitudes and typical behaviour. He or she is individualised and life-like, original and unpredictable in his or her behaviour.

A flat character is less important and tends not to develop. He is reduced to a small number of traits so that his/her behaviour is conventional and predictable. You can very quickly tell what kind of person he or she is.

A stock character is one who embodies a particular idea or quality and who lacks the roundness of a real human being. Examples might be the nagging wife, the old drunkard or the bad boy who only thinks of how to annoy adults or (especially) teachers.

Characterization

The way of presenting a character in a text. We can distinguish two basic methods:

a) explicit or direct characterization

The author may provide a description of a character through the words of the narrator, or another character in the text may comment on him/her, or the character may describe himself or herself. Usually only an omniscient narrator's explicit characterization is objective and conclusive, since the other characters or the character him- or herself may present the reader or audience with selected information, revealing only what they want to have known.

b) implicit or indirect characterization

The reader or audience learns of the character through dialogue and action, rather than through description.