

Indirect Characterization

Characterization refers to how authors develop characters in their writing. As we read, we need to understand the characters so that we understand how their actions help the plot to unfold. We also usually like to get a sense of what they look like as we read.

There are two main types of characterization: direct and indirect characterization. Direct characterization is when the author comes right out and tells the reader what to think about the character.

Examples of Indirect Characterization:

Jeff was a mean boy.

Joe's boss was stingy and rude.

Clarissa was the nicest girl in school.

Indirect characterization is the opposite of direct characterization. Instead of coming out and telling you what to think about the character, the author describes the person's appearance, actions and words, and sometimes even thoughts to help the reader form an opinion about the character.

Read the examples of indirect characterization and choose the direct description that matches the character.

Examples of Indirect Characterization:

Jeff walked up to Mark. His long bony hands took the sandwich off of Mark's plate. He took a bite, wiped the jam from his long thin lips, smirked at Mark, and then walked away.

When it was time to go home, Joe's boss called him to his office. His brow was furrowed and he sat with his thick muscular arms folded. He told Joe that he would not get his paycheck for the week, until he finished a report on the new product. Then, his boss got up, turned the lights off, and left the office to go home. Joe trudged back to his desk. He rubbed his dark, hollow eyes, tied back his long blonde hair and got back to work.

Sally put on her brothers grey jacket. As she walked to the door, it swept the floor. Before leaving, she tied back her hair, grabbed a black felt hat and then headed out into the rain. Her feet were soon wet. She put her petite hands, that were now blue, to her mouth and softly blew onto them. As her glasses fogged up, she struggled to stay on the path.

Read the character traits and decide if they show direct characterization.

Thomas ducked as he walked through the doorway.

Jacob had a friendly face and was well dressed.

A large, giant of a man stormed into the room.

In his huge hands, Jacob held a large knife.

The prince was very handsome.

Derek had a strong chiselled face, high cheekbones and piercing blue eyes.

A man hunched holding a walking stick entered the room.

His jacket swept the floor behind him as made his way to a table.

Percy smiled flashing his perfect white teeth and his jolly laugh made every-one relax.

He sniggered, and his wrinkled lips twisted as he frowned.

His bald, white head was round and looked like a soccer ball.

We usually use indirect characterization to describe the main character in our story. As we write we add more details that help the reader understand how our character looks and what types of character traits he has.

Thomas ducked as he walked through the doorway. The room was dark and noisy. Travellers sat at wooded tables eating and drinking. In the corner, by a fireplace an old woman played a piano. Old paintings, of battles long passed, hung from the stone walls. Thomas tied back his long blond hair and wiped the sweat off his long, thin face with the back of his hand. His jacket swept the floor behind him as made his way to a table. Thomas smiled flashing his perfect white teeth, which made every-one relax. He picked up the food-stained menu.

When other characters are introduced, we then use direct characterization to describe them.

While reading the menu Thomas was interrupted. A young girl, with a pretty round face and blue eyes that sparkled like sapphires asked him in a sweet voice, "Are you ready to order?" She was wearing a long white dress, as was the custom in the kingdom of Rohan. Being an apprentice chef, she wore a green apron, which was also a tradition. After taking his order she secretly passed Thomas a small slip of paper, hidden under the serviette that she held in right hand. MEET BEHIND THE STABLES JUST BEFORE SUNSET. The young waitress was soon back with his meal. He noticed the red ribbon tying back her long blond hair. In his kingdom, those loyal to the king always wore red ribbons. Was this a sign? Thomas finished his meal, sat for a while pondering the meaning of the message, then made his way to the stables

Apart from the occasional whinny of a horse and the clucking of hens, the old wooden building appeared to be deserted. Thomas screwed up his nose as he walked past piles of manure and old hay. Thomas looked behind to make sure he was not followed. The dusty streets were empty. Most people had settled in for the evening. Darkness brought danger. Thomas took a deep breath; his thin hands, blue from the cold, shook as he buttoned up his jacket. Before turning the corner, he slipped his hand right hand onto his sword. Standing in the doorway, **an old man, short, and a little chubby. He had a jolly, round face and was dressed in fine clothes** showing that he came from the palace. **He had pale skin** and when he took off his hat **his bald head** which looked like a white soccer ball, shone in the fading light of the orange sun. As he raised his **sausage like fingers**, a gesture of friendship; Thomas noticed the red ribbon on his **puffy wrist**.