

Notes on Character

Character

- Persona in a story, poem, or play

Characterization

- The process of revealing the personality of a character
- Two types: direct and indirect
- **Direct**—the writer tells us directly what a character is like or what a character's motives are
- **Indirect**—the writer *shows* us a character but allows us to interpret for ourselves the kind of person we are meeting. We are able to piece together what a character is like through the character's:
 - speech
 - actions
 - appearance
 - private thoughts
 - reputation (the ways they affect other characters)

A few notes on characterization:

- Authors almost always use indirect characterization to show us what a character is like
- Think about the point-of-view, and keep in mind that you are being given a forced perspective of a character. You can only see what the narrator sees or what the narrator decides to tell you, which means that the impression you get of a character may be misleading at first. Pay attention to hints that the author sometimes provides that maybe everything is not quite as it seems.

Character Types

- **Static**—does not change much through the course of a story
 - when labeling a character as static, you need to offer evidence from the beginning and the end of the story to show that the character has not changed
 - Example: Zaroff shows no remorse for killing in his early conversations with Rainsford, and at the end, even when he is about to die, he shows no remorse but instead shows a willingness to play the game to the end.
- **Dynamic**—changes as a result of the story's events
 - when identifying a character as dynamic, you must be able to provide evidence from the beginning and end of the story to show that the character has changed (**NOTE**: this does **not** refer to a *physical* change but rather a change in the *personality traits* of the character)
 - Example: In "The Necklace," Mathilde demonstrates a whiny discontent with her middle class social status, but at the end, when she experiences the bitter hardships of the poor, the narrator describes her as assuming her new class status with "sudden heroism," implying that she no longer passively complains about her life.
- **Flat**—has only one or two traits, and these can be described in a few words
 - To prove a character is flat, you need to be able to sum up the character in just few words, demonstrating that he or she is basically a stereotype
 - Example: In "The Most Dangerous Game," Ivan is a simple brute, used to pose a threat to Rainsford if he doesn't do as Zaroff would like. We never know about any other part of his character except that he likes to torture people, and he is loyal to Zaroff.
 - Note: Generally speaking, there are very few flat characters in literature, and they are almost **never** the main character.

- Also, keep in mind that “flat” does not describe the personality of the character. Just because a character may be emotionally flat or even boring, that has nothing to do with the character
- **Round**—like a real person, has many different character traits, which sometimes contradict one another
 - To prove a character is round, you need to provide evidence that the character has some depth. An easy way to do this is to show that character has some contradictory character traits. You could also provide evidence that there are many facets to the character’s personality.
 - Example: Zaroff is a round character because, on the one hand, he is very sophisticated, educated, and charming as seen in his ability to welcome a guest and treat him to a fine meal and intelligent conversation. However, we also see that he is savage (as he openly admits) in the way he feels no remorse about hunting down and killing innocent men.