

Character and Point of View

Characters in literature can be just as fascinating as people in your own life. Like real people, characters can be painfully shy, rude, or courageous. Some characters instantly draw you in, while others get on your nerves. Why do you react so strongly to the people you meet on the page? When writers use the elements of character and point of view skillfully, they create believable characters. Read on to learn more about character and point of view.

COMMON CORE

Included in this workshop:
RL 3 Describe how a story's characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution. **RL 6** Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator in a text.

Part 1: Who Tells the Story?

Suppose two of your closest friends got into a heated argument. You heard about the argument from each friend and from an innocent bystander who overheard every word. How would the three accounts differ? As this example shows, *who* tells a story is just as important as *what* that story is about. In literature, the **narrator** is the voice that tells the story. A writer's choice of narrator is known as **point of view**. This chart explains two points of view.

FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

The narrator

- is a character in the story
- uses the pronouns *I*, *me*, and *my* to refer to himself or herself
- tells his or her own thoughts and feelings in his or her own voice
- does not know what other characters are thinking and feeling



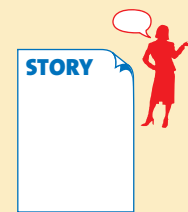
Example

I was flying along when I spotted sparks exploding on the street below. The evil ShockBlaster was attacking innocent people! Time for me to come to the rescue again. Angry and annoyed, I realized that talented superheroes like me *never* get the day off.

THIRD-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

The narrator

- is not a character in the story
- uses the pronouns *he*, *she*, and *they* to refer to the characters
- can reveal the thoughts, opinions, and feelings of one or more characters



Example

As Dynamyte zoomed toward the explosion, a billion thoughts raced through his mind. He wondered why villains always started trouble on his day off.

From a roof above the panicked crowd, ShockBlaster saw Dynamyte swooping across the sky toward him. "Him again?" ShockBlaster muttered.



MODEL 1: FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

The novel *Walk Two Moons* is about a 13-year-old girl named Salamanca. People call her Sal for short. One day, her mother leaves home forever, prompting Sal to deal with some confusing feelings.

from **WALK TWO MOONS**

Novel by **Sharon Creech**

When my mother left for Lewiston, Idaho, that April, my first thoughts were, “How could she do that? How could she leave me?”

As the days went on, many things were harder and sadder, but some things were strangely easier. When my mother had been there, I was like
5 a mirror. If she was happy, I was happy. If she was sad, I was sad. For the first few days after she left, I felt numb, non-feeling. I didn’t know how to feel. I would find myself looking around for her, to see what I might want to feel.

Close Read

1. Reread the boxed sentences. Find the pronouns that show the first-person point of view.
2. How does her mother’s departure initially affect Sal? Find two details that reveal Sal’s feelings.



MODEL 2: THIRD-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

Becky believes she was born to play golf. After practice one day, she encounters an elderly neighbor named Doña Carmen Maria. Notice what the third-person narrator reveals about Becky’s thoughts.

from **How Becky Garza Learned Golf**

Short story by **Gary Soto**

Doña Carmen Maria reached for one of the clubs in the bag. She said it was like a sword. She poked the air and laughed to herself.

Becky didn’t smile. She was hot, thirsty, and uneasy with the old woman who again started to play with the mole on her throat. But
5 Becky’s parents had always taught her to respect elders. And she had to respect Doña Carmen Maria because, if not, Becky feared the old woman would walk down the street and report her incivility. Becky could see herself grounded until she was as old as Doña Carmen Maria herself.





Close Read

1. How can you tell that this story is told from the third-person point of view? Support your answer.
2. Does Becky seem to like Doña Carmen Maria? Find details that describe Becky’s thoughts and feelings about her neighbor.

Part 2: The People on the Page

When you meet someone, you form an impression based on certain clues, such as how the person looks, talks, or acts. Similar clues can help you get to know characters in literature. By noticing important details, you can infer a character's **traits**, or qualities, like shyness or friendliness. These traits can be seen in a character's behavior throughout a story in the way he or she responds or changes as the plot moves toward a resolution.

Writers use four methods to develop their characters. Use the questions and examples shown to help you understand one superhero's personality.

METHODS OF CHARACTERIZATION	EXAMPLES
 <p>CHARACTER'S PHYSICAL APPEARANCE A character's look can influence your first impression of him or her. Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does the character look like?• What facial expressions or gestures does he or she make?	<p>Sparks of fire sizzled in Dynamyte's hair whenever he was getting ready to show off. He smiled confidently and flexed his muscles for the crowd.</p>
 <p>CHARACTER'S THOUGHTS, SPEECH, AND ACTIONS A character's own words and actions can reflect his or her personality. Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the character speak in a dialect that reflects the community in which he or she lives?• What kinds of things worry him or her?• How does he or she act toward others?	<p>Dynamyte forgot about his day off when he realized how important he was to the city. "This is what happens when you're the <i>only</i> one capable of saving the world," he boasted as he prepared to show off some more.</p>
 <p>OTHER CHARACTERS' REACTIONS The words or actions of other characters can tell you about a character. Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do others treat the character?• What do they say about him or her?	<p>ShockBlaster cringed in fear as he saw Dynamyte speeding toward him. "I must escape! I'll never win a battle against him."</p>
 <p>NARRATOR'S DIRECT COMMENTS The narrator may directly tell you about a character's personality. Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What qualities does the narrator say the character has?• Does the narrator admire the character?	<p>Dynamyte's talent and skill made up for his bad attitude. He made saving the world look so easy!</p>

**METHOD 1: PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

In this fable, three princes compete for the love of a princess named Meliversa. As you read, look for descriptions of Meliversa's appearance.

from *The Fable of the*
Three Princes

Short story by **Isaac Asimov**

That night there was a great feast, and the three princes were the guests of honor.

The emperor, seated on a splendid throne at the head of the table, greeted them. Next to him was the princess Meliversa, and she was indeed as beautiful as the sun. Her hair was long and the color of corn silk. Her eyes were blue and reminded everyone of the sky on a bright spring day. Her features were perfectly regular and her skin was flawless.

But her eyes were empty, and her face was expressionless.

Close Read

1. Find three details that describe Meliversa's beauty. One detail has been boxed.
2. Reread line 8. What do you learn about Meliversa from this description?

**METHOD 2: SPEECH AND ACTIONS**

Writers may use dialect to convey information about the community in which a character lives. **Dialect** is a form of language spoken in a particular place by a particular group of people. It features unique pronunciations and vocabulary. The narrator in "Jeremiah's Song" uses informal speech and grammar. Read the following passage aloud to hear the dialect.

from **JEREMIAH'S**
Song Short story by **Walter Dean Myers**

I knowed my cousin Ellie was gonna be mad when Macon Smith come around to the house. She didn't have no use for Macon even when things was going right, and when Grandpa Jeremiah was fixing to die I just knowed she wasn't gonna be liking him hanging around. Grandpa Jeremiah raised Ellie after her folks died and they used to be real close. Then she got to go on to college and when she come back the first year she was different. She didn't want to hear all them stories he used to tell her anymore. Ellie said the stories wasn't true, and that's why she didn't want to hear them.

Close Read

1. Read the boxed text aloud. Then, restate the sentence using formal language. What do you learn about the characters from the writer's use of dialect?
2. Why do you think Ellie doesn't want to hear Grandpa Jeremiah's stories any more? How might college have changed her?



METHOD 3: OTHER CHARACTERS

In this excerpt, Cammy is listening to her cousin Patty Ann play the piano. As you read, notice how Cammy reacts to Patty Ann.

from **COUSINS** Novel by Virginia Hamilton

She [Cammy] couldn't sit still. Being there with her cousin made her as angry as she could be.

Good at everything, Cammy thought to Patty Ann's back. In school, at home, at her piano. Miss Goody-goody. . . .

- 5 The music stopped abruptly. Patty Ann turned the page of a small notebook next to her music. The page was blank. She'd come to the end of her lessons. She closed the book. Closed her music books, too. She closed the piano top over the piano keys. To Cammy, everything she did was like chalk scraping on a blackboard.

Close Read

1. Does Cammy like Patty Ann? How can you tell?
2. Reread the boxed text. What impression of Patty Ann do you get from Cammy's reaction to her?



METHOD 4: NARRATOR'S COMMENTS

Sometimes, the narrator directly tells readers what a character is like. As you read this excerpt, think about how you would describe the soldier based on what the narrator tells you about him.

from **The King's Dragon**
Short story by Jane Yolen

There was once a soldier who had fought long and hard for his king. He had been wounded in the war and sent home for a rest.

Hup and one. Hup and two. He marched down the long, dusty road, using a crutch.

- 5 He was a member of the Royal Dragoons. His red-and-gold uniform was dirty and torn. And in the air of the winter's day, his breath plumed out before him like a cloud.

Hup and one. Hup and two. Wounded or not, he marched with a proud step. For the Royal Dragoons are the finest soldiers in the land and—they always obey orders.

10

Close Read

1. Look at the narrator's comments in the boxed sentences. Which word would you say does *not* describe the soldier?
 - a. loyal
 - b. lazy
 - c. proud
2. Does the narrator seem to respect the soldier? Explain.

Part 3: Analyze the Text

Meet Anastasia Krupnik, one of Lois Lowry's most memorable characters. For homework last night, Anastasia had to write a poem. Now, she must read it in front of her entire class. Use what you've learned to analyze this excerpt.

from **ANASTASIA KRUPNIK**

Novel by **Lois Lowry**

Anastasia had begun to feel a little funny, as if she had ginger ale inside of her knees. But it was her turn. She stood up in front of the class and read her poem. Her voice was very small, because she was nervous.

5 *hush hush the sea-soft night is aswim*
 with wrinklesquirm creatures
 listen (!)
 to them move smooth in the moistly dark
 here in the whisperwarm wet

That was Anastasia's poem.

10 "Read that again, please, Anastasia, in a bigger voice," said Mrs. Westvessel.

So Anastasia took a deep breath and read her poem again. She used the same kind of voice that her father did when he read poetry to her, drawing some of the words out as long as licorice sticks, and making
 15 some others thumpingly short.

The class laughed.

Mrs. Westvessel looked puzzled. "Let me see that, Anastasia," she said. Anastasia gave her the poem.

Mrs. Westvessel's ordinary, everyday face had about one hundred
 20 wrinkles in it. When she looked at Anastasia's poem, her forehead and nose folded up so that she had two hundred new wrinkles all of a sudden.

"Where are your capital letters, Anastasia?" asked Mrs. Westvessel.

Anastasia didn't say anything.

25 "Where is the rhyme?" asked Mrs. Westvessel. "It doesn't rhyme at *all*."

Anastasia didn't say anything.

"What kind of poem *is* this, Anastasia?" asked Mrs. Westvessel. "Can you explain it, please?"

Anastasia's voice had become very small again, the way voices do, sometimes. "It's a poem of sounds," she said. "It's about little things that
 30 live in tidepools, after dark, when they move around. It doesn't have sentences or capital letters because I wanted it to look on the page like small creatures moving in the dark."

Close Read

1. Is this story told from the first-person or the third-person point of view? How can you tell?
2. Is Anastasia someone who feels comfortable in front of large crowds? Cite details to support your answer.
3. Give your impression of Mrs. Westvessel from the boxed details. Do you think she is a believable character? Explain.
4. Reread lines 24 and 26 where Mrs. Westvessel talks to Anastasia. Why are certain words italicized? What does the author's use of conversational voice tell you about Mrs. Westvessel's character?