

Character

I) *Character and plot are inseparable.*

- A) Character is more likely to be emphasized in interpretive literature than in escape literature.
- Characters are the people in narratives, and characterization is the author's presentation and development of characters.
 - Sometimes the characters are not people. They may be animals, or robots, or creatures from outer space, but the author gives them human abilities and human psychological traits. Thus they are really people in all but outward form.
- B) The focus in interpretive literature is on the character not on the action.
- Character is complex, variable, and ambiguous.

II) *The inexperienced reader's character is always attractive.*

- A) He is decent or at least has some good qualities (e.g. dashing, daring, gallant).
- B) The reader becomes the main character and, therefore, must be flattered by the image of self.

III) *Interpretive fiction has a greater variety of characters with a wider variety of characteristics. We get an unparalleled opportunity to observe human nature.*

- A) We can see them in situations that are significant and which bring forth their character in ways that ordinary life rarely does.
- B) We can view their inner thoughts and feelings.

IV) *There are two general ways that authors reveal character: directly and indirectly.*

- A) **Direct presentation** of characters occurs when the author simply tells the reader what the character is like. Other characters in the story may also directly tell the reader what a character is like.
- This method is clear and economical, but must not be used alone.
- B) **Indirect presentation** occurs when the author shows us what the character is like. This is done by:
- describing the character's physical appearance.
 - showing the character's words and actions.
 - revealing the character's thoughts.
 - showing how the character is treated by others.

V) Characterization must observe three principles:

- A) The character must have consistent behavior.
- B) The character must be clearly motivated, especially if there is a behavior change.
- C) The character must be lifelike or plausible.

VI) Characters are either relatively *flat (simple)* or *round (complex)*. Either way, they must be necessary to the story to be included.

- A) **Flat characters** have one or two personality traits (e.g. the stupid athlete, the lazy husband).
 - Most **minor** characters in short stories are **flat**.
 - The **stock character** is a special kind of flat character.
 - the stereotyped character who we immediately know (e.g. the mad scientist, the strong silent sheriff)
- B) The **round character** is complex and has multiple personality traits. They resemble real people.
 - They are much harder to understand and describe than flat characters.
 - No single description or interpretation can fully contain them.
 - The round character takes longer to develop than the flat character.

VII) All characters are either *static* or *developing (changing or dynamic)*.

- A) The **static character** is the same from beginning to end. Usually static characters are flat.
- B) The **developing character** undergoes a permanent change of character, personality, or outlook. Usually **developing** characters are **round**.
 - There are usually a limited number of developing characters in any one story, particularly a short story.
 - The change in character is often the clue to the story's meaning.
 - The changes must be believable:
 - within the possibilities of the character
 - sufficiently motivated by the circumstances
 - given sufficient time to occur
- C) The climax of the growth of the main character(s) is called an ***epiphany***, a sudden revelation of truth experienced by a character.
 - The term comes from the Bible and describes the Wise Men's first perception of Christ's divinity.

Questions about character

- I) The overriding questions are, "What is the character like?" "What are the characters' traits?" To answer these questions, one can ask:
- A) Are the characters flat, round, dynamic, or static?
 - Do they change?
 - How and why do they change?
 - What steps do they go through to change?
 - Does what they learn help or hinder them?
 - B) What problems do they have?
 - How do they attempt to solve them?
 - C) What types of characters do they represent?
 - If they are complex, what makes them complex?
 - Do they have traits that contradict one another and therefore cause internal conflicts?
 - Do they have conflicting attitudes about something?
 - Do they understand themselves?
 - D) Do they experience epiphanies?
 - When, why, and what do their epiphanies reveal to them and us?
 - E) How do the characters relate to each other?
 - What pleasures and conflicts do their relationships with one another cause?
 - Does the author want us to compare one character with another?
 - F) Do the characters have speech mannerisms, gestures, or modes of dress that reveal their inner selves?
 - Is the character happy, sad, or in-between?
 - Is the character mentally disturbed?