**CHARACTERIZATION**

Definition: Characterization is the representation of the traits, motives, and psychology of a character in a narrative. Characterization may occur through direct description, in which the character's qualities are described by a narrator, another character, or by the character him or herself. It may also occur indirectly, in which the character's qualities are revealed by his or her actions, thoughts, or dialogue.

**Direct Characterization**

In direct characterization, the author directly describes/states facts about a character's qualities. Such direct description may come from a narrator, from another character, or through self-description by the character in question.

**Ex. 1:** “The patient boy and quiet girl were both well-mannered and did not disobey their mother.”

*Here the author is directly telling the audience the personality of these two children. The boy is “patient” and the girl is “quiet.” Both are “well-mannered.”*

**Ex. 2:** “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.” *–* F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*.

When an author uses direct characterization, the reader doesn’t have to do any “detective work.”

**Indirect Characterization: S.T.E.A.L.**

In indirect characterization, rather than explicitly describe a character's qualities, an author shows the character as he or she moves through the world, allowing the reader to infer the character's qualities from his or her behavior. Details that might contribute to the indirect characterization of a character can be determined by using the acronym STEAL:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Speech** | **What does the character say?**  **How does the character speak?** |
| **Thoughts** | **What is revealed through the character’s private thoughts and feelings?** |
| **Effect on others toward the character (relationships)** | **What is revealed through the character’s effect on other people?**  **How do other characters behave in reaction to the character?** |
| **Actions** | **What does the character do?**  **How does the character behave?** |
| **Looks (appearance)** | **What does the character look like?**  **How does the character dress?** |

**Examples:**

“Bill sighed as he looked at the offer of a gym membership. He really should join. But just thinking about it made beads of sweat collect at the top of his bald spot.”

“As Jane walked past the box labeled ‘Free Puppies,’ she furtively glanced around her, then gave the box a swift kick.”

“I yawned, trying to keep my eyes open in the meeting. I reached for my coffee cup and was disappointed to realize it was empty. My colleagues stared at me, sighed, and gave each a knowing look. It wasn’t the first time I’d walked into a meeting looking like something the cat dragged in.”