ENGLISH, LITERACY, AND COMMUNICATION

Characterization

Difficulty level: Intermediate

English, Literacy, and Communication

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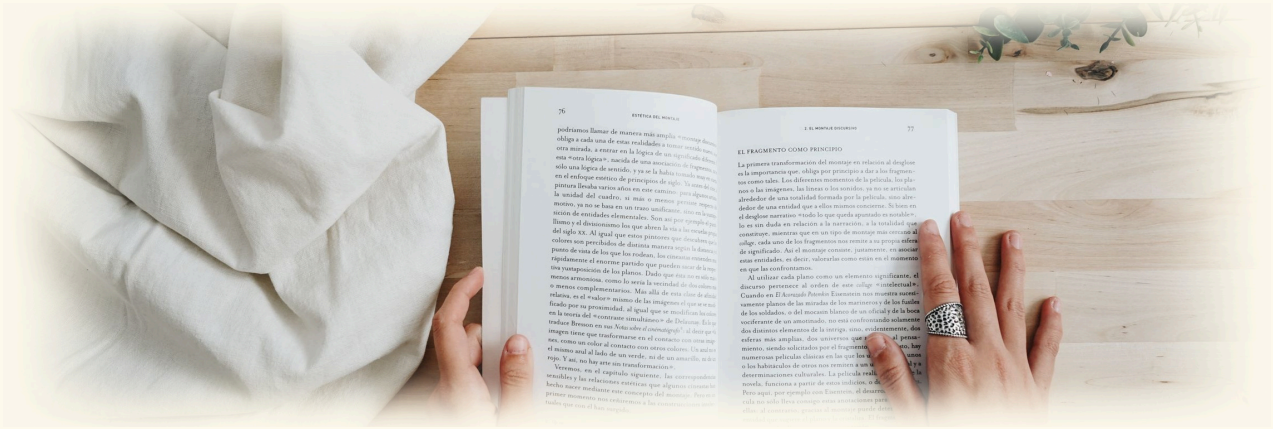
Overview of the concept

This is how you figure out what a character in a story is really like. You learn from what they do and say, as well as what the writer tells you directly. A character who always helps others is kind even if the writer never uses the word kind, and spotting that is what makes reading a story richer.



Rule

Characterization: direct characterization is when the writer simply tells you the trait, such as 'Sara was kind.' Indirect characterization is when you infer the trait from what the character does or says.

Ask: does the writer state the trait, or do you work it out from an action or speech? An action that shows kindness is indirect characterization.

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Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q How is Sara shown here? 'Sara was kind.' Direct or indirect?

SOLUTION

Ask: does the writer simply tell you the trait? Yes, 'was kind' states it.

No action or speech is used to show it.

So it is direct characterization.

EXAMPLE 2

Q How is Tom shown here? Tom gave his lunch to a hungry classmate. Direct or indirect?

SOLUTION

Ask: does the writer state a trait? No.

You infer kindness from Tom's action.

So it is indirect characterization.

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Practice questions

1 Direct or indirect? 'Ben was brave.'

A Direct

B Indirect

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2 Direct or indirect? Ben ran into the burning building to help.

A Direct

B Indirect

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3 Which sentence is direct characterization?

- A Ana whispered and hid behind her mother.
- B Ana avoided the stage.
- C 'Ana is shy.'
- D Ana looked at the floor and said nothing.

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4 Direct or indirect? 'Please don't make me speak in front of everyone,' Ana whispered.

- A Direct
- B Indirect

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5

Why is 'The teacher was strict' direct characterization?

A It shows the trait through an action.

B It states the trait outright.

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6

The teacher gave detention for whispering. What trait does this show?

A Kind

B Funny

C Shy

D Strict

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7 Rewrite 'Mia is funny' as indirect characterization. Which sentence does it best?

- **A** Mia likes jokes.
- **B** Mia is the funniest girl in the class.
- **C** 'Mia is funny.'
- **D** Mia made the whole class laugh with a joke.

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8 Why is 'Jake returned the lost wallet' indirect characterization?

- **A** You have to work out the trait from what Jake did.
- **B** It states the trait outright.

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9 **Rewrite 'Jake returned the lost wallet' as direct characterization. Which sentence does it best?**

- A Jake found a wallet.
- B Jake walked home.
- C 'Jake is honest.'
- D Jake lost his wallet.

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10 **Direct or indirect? 'Jake is the most honest boy in our class,' said his teacher.**

- A Direct
- B Indirect

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ANSWER KEY

1. Direct

2. Indirect

3. 'Ana is shy.'

4. Indirect

5. It states the trait outright.

6. Strict

7. Mia made the whole class laugh with a joke.

8. You have to work out the trait from what Jake did.

9. 'Jake is honest.'

10. Direct

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