

In this lesson, we'll examine five methods of characterization, including physical description, action, inner thoughts, reactions, and speech. An excerpt from a brief narrative is provided to show how authors use the various methods of characterization to develop characters and create images for the audience.

## Methods of Characterization in Literature

**Characterization** in literature is the process authors use to develop characters and create images of the characters for the audience. There are two different approaches to characterization, including **direct characterization** and **indirect characterization**. With the direct approach, the author tells us what he or she wants us to know about the character. With indirect characterization, the author shows us things about the character to help us have an understanding of the character's personality and effect on other characters.

## Five Methods of Characterization

An acronym, **PAIRS**, can help you recall the five methods of characterization: physical description, action, inner thoughts, reactions, and speech.

**Physical description** - the character's physical appearance is described. For example, characters might be described as tall, thin, fat, pretty, etc. We might be told the color of hair or something about the clothing of the character. How the character dresses might reveal something about the character. Does the character wear old, dirty clothing, or stylish, expensive clothing?

**Action/attitude/behavior** - What the character does tells us a lot about him/her, as well as how the character behaves and his or her attitude. Is the character a good person or a bad person? Is the character helpful to others or selfish?

**Inner thoughts** - What the character thinks reveals things about the character. We discover things about their personalities and feelings, which sometimes helps us understand the character's actions.

**Reactions** - Effect on others or what the other characters say and feel about this character. We learn about the relationships among the characters. How does the character make the other characters feel? Do they feel scared, happy, or confused? This helps the reader have a better understanding of all the characters.

**Speech** - What the character says provides a great deal of insight for the reader. The character might speak in a shy, quiet manner or in a nervous manner. The character might speak intelligently or in a rude manner.

## The Characters

A frog, a bird, a dog, a sheep, a pig, a crow. That sounds like the diet for something that eats all kinds of animals, but it's just a list of some characters we can find in stories we read. When we read a story, it is very important we identify who is part of it and their role.

We want to approach character analysis through three basic steps. Do not skip or change the order of any steps because that will take away your ability to analyze the text properly. You can remember them with the acronym CID. These are the three steps:

1. **Comprehend**: Gain a basic understanding after reading the story
2. **Interpret**: Dig deeper into the details
3. **Draw conclusions**: Using what was learned from steps one and two, you can draw analytical conclusions

Let's read about the three little pigs and the big bad wolf and then analyze the characters.

Once upon a time, there were three little pigs who lived with their grandmother. As they grew older, the youngest and yet most mature, decided they should all build houses for themselves. The other two brothers decided that would be a great idea. The oldest, who didn't like to work and was lazy, built a house of hay.

The middle brother, who wanted to play all day built a house of wood. The youngest, and wisest, built a house of brick.

One day, the big bad wolf came out of the forest and knocked on the door of the house of hay. Then he blew the house down. The pig escaped and ran to the house of wood. Next, the wolf blew down the house of wood. The two pigs escaped and ran to the house of brick. The wolf, assuming the third house was as weak as the other two, blew and blew with no avail. He then tried the chimney. The wisest pig built a fire at the bottom of the chimney and burnt the wolf, who then ran far away and never returned.

## **Comprehend**

To comprehend means gaining a basic understanding. To comprehend the characters, we can ask questions like:

- Who are the characters?
- Who is the protagonist?
- Who is the antagonist?

In *The Three Little Pigs*, there are three pigs, a grandmother pig and a wolf. The youngest pig is the protagonist, and the wolf is the antagonist. The protagonist is the main character that represents the hero, and the antagonist is the one that opposes the protagonist (the bad guy).

## **Interpret**

To interpret the characters, we want to dig a little deeper into the details than in the comprehension stage. We can ask questions about their traits, behavior, perception and purpose.

Character traits ask questions like:

- What can we tell about the character's personality?
- What does the character look like, and how do they dress?
- Where are the characters from?
- What is their social status and economic background?

The youngest pig is wise, patient and mature. The middle pig is playful. The oldest pig is lazy and shuns hard work. The wolf is described as big and bad. He seems hungry and persistent with a healthy set of lungs.

Character behavior ask questions like:

- How does the character respond to obstacles?
- How does the character interact with other characters?
- Why does the character behave that way?

The youngest pig, when faced with an obstacle, thinks of a good solution and takes action. He builds a strong brick house and also builds a fire in the chimney to deter the wolf because he is the wise pig. The middle pig takes the easy way when building a house and runs away from his problem (the wolf) because he isn't focused enough to do things well. The oldest pig also takes the easy way when building a house and runs away from his problem (the wolf) because he is too lazy. The wolf uses his strong force when facing obstacles because he is big and bad.