

Characterization

Section 18.1

Direct and Indirect Characterization

Direct Characterization

Characterization is the way the author reveals a character's personality or nature. In **direct characterization**, the author describes the character or makes statements about him.



Example 1: Jordan at five is a sweet but mischievous girl who loves to dress up and play pretend games.

In this example of **direct characterization**, the author both describes the girl's nature and tells about what she loves to do. The author is not showing us through her actions yet.

Indirect Characterization

In **indirect characterization**, the author shows the reader something about the character through the character's words, his thoughts, his actions, or what other characters say or think about him. Indirect characterization is more effective because the author is showing, rather than just telling.

Indirect Characterization Through The Character's Words

Example 2: The husband was fussing at his wife. "That bag of lettuce is half empty. Why didn't you try to get one that had more in it? I can't believe you didn't look at the bag more carefully at the grocery store."

How is the husband indirectly characterized in this passage? Through his words, the husband he is characterized as picky and critical. The author doesn't have to tell us these characteristics directly.



Indirect Characterization Through The Character's Thoughts

Example 3: As he sat brooding in his room, Caleb thought of how his baby sister spoiled everything. He thought of how things used to be before she arrived. He wanted to go to Disney World and have fun for his fourth birthday. He got an idea. Buck, their neighbor, feeds the dogs when they go out of town, so Buck could come by and feed the baby when he came to feed the dogs. He loved to play with her, and he could do that. He got up to go tell his mother.



Here we see the thoughts of a little boy about his frustrations with his new baby sister and the solution he thought of to solve the problem. We are shown his thoughts, and the reader sees an intelligent little problem-solver.

Section 18.1, continued
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Indirect Characterization Through The Character's Actions

Actions can tell the reader the most about an individual. People's actions usually show more than words because people may say one thing but do another.

Example 4: Julie began fixing supper while the children played. First she washed the romaine lettuce with grapefruit seed extract. Then she got out the mill to grind the corn. After it was ready, she used honey to replace the sugar in the recipe and put the cornbread in the oven. The dried beans were simmering in the crock pot. She washed and cut up the fresh strawberries they had picked that morning for dessert.



How is Julie, the mother, characterized? Through her actions, we see a conscientious mother concerned about the nutrition of her family. She cares enough to work harder in preparing meals the way she thinks is best.

Indirect Characterization Through The Other Characters' Words

Example 5: After visiting my sister Jean, Frances said, "She really knows how to get a lot of storage into every space, doesn't she?"
"Yes," I answered. "Organizing is a fun challenge for her and is what she enjoys. She never stops but keeps reorganizing in better ways."

How is Jean indirectly characterized? From the conversation between Frances and Jean's sister, the reader gets a picture of Jean's organizational skills.

Practice

Read each example and then answer the questions about characterization.

Doris moaned as she sat gingerly on the chair and frowned as she squirmed a little.

- (A) (B) (C) (D) 1. What method of characterization does the author use in this example to describe Doris?
- A. direct characterization
 - B. indirect characterization through Doris's actions
 - C. indirect characterization through Doris's thoughts
 - D. indirect characterization through Doris's words

Little Bruce was three years old and loved anything with wheels but especially Thomas the Train and the many named cars that could be bought.

- (A) (B) (C) (D) 2. What method of characterization does the author use in this example for Bruce?
- A. direct characterization
 - B. indirect characterization through Bruce's actions
 - C. indirect characterization through Bruce's thoughts
 - D. indirect characterization through Bruce's words