

Toolkit Focus: Characterisation

In fiction, effective characterisation is one of most important elements to master. As readers we are drawn into stories by the characters that inhabit them. As writers we seek to create characters who are believable and who come alive for our audience. Some we empathise with, other may scare us, some are likeable and others we love to hate. Our reading into writing is vital from an early stage as we explore with children both their reaction and response to characters and then begin to 'read as a writer' to unpick the techniques and tools we can use as writers to develop our own engaging characters. In the early stages of characterisation, young children more generally concentrate on physical description. However, through reading, talk, questioning and drama even at an early stage we can scaffold a much wider concept of character development which then can be explicitly explored cumulatively as pupils move through the key stages. Appearance is importance of course but this toolkit explores characterisation not just through physical description but through personality and behaviour as well. The role of dialogue (in blue) is a key tool to use and will be explored as an integral part of characterisation as we seek to create characters who are so real they jump off the page!

Year R,	Year 1, 2	Year 3, 4	Year 5, 6
<p>- Develop descriptive vocabulary (synonyms and antonyms) through orally discussing the features of characters and their profiles. e.g. What do you think is thinking? How do you thinkfeels? Do you like? What makes you like them? What do you think would say? Why do you thinkbehaved like that?</p> <p>- Use adjectives to describe the character. e.g. tall, scruffy, sad, lonely, old etc..</p> <p>- Use emotions images to explore a character's feelings. e.g. sad, happy, worried, scared etc..</p> <p>- Capital letter for a character's name.</p> <p>- Use drama and role play to begin to explore character's actions and speech in stories.</p> <p>Introduce speech bubbles and thinking bubbles as visual aids to help focus talk on what a character is saying and thinking</p>	<p>Building on YR work:</p> <p>- Use expanded noun phrases to describe the character. e.g. Personality: <i>The brave, young knight strode forward.</i> Appearance: <i>The tall, handsome knight kissed the damsel.</i></p> <p>- Practice using show don't tell to reveal a character's feelings. e.g. <i>the teenager stomped his feet loudly. This shows the reader the teen is angry rather than telling.</i></p> <p>- Use feelings and personality traits to build a character. e.g. trouble maker, day dreamer, hard-working, joker.</p> <p>- Use adverbs of manner to describe a character's actions and movement. e.g. slowly, happily, angrily, anxiously, cautiously, excitedly, smartly.</p> <p>- Use a carefully selected character name to hint their personality. e.g. <i>Miss Trunchbull v Miss Honey;</i></p> <p>- Use a 'list of 3' (with comma) for description detail. e.g. <i>The alien had green hair, an enormous nose and seemed to be completely confused.</i></p> <p>- Use similes to help the reader visualise the character e.g. <i>the giant's head was as large as a dustbin</i></p> <p>- Begin to use dialogue and speech verbs to show a character talking. e.g. <i>said, screamed, shouted, called, whispered.</i></p> <p>- Use drama and hot seating to explore character details. e.g. Where do they live? Do they have any brothers and sisters? What is their favourite hobby?</p>	<p>Building on Y1/Y2 work:</p> <p>- Use comparatives and superlatives to describe. e.g. <i>He was taller than the Empire State Building... He was the bravest knight in the whole eight kingdoms...</i></p> <p>- Use subordination to add detail for effect. e.g. <i>When he reached his bed, the exhausted boy collapsed. The young girl smiled at the woman because she was lonely.</i></p> <p>- Use expanded noun phrases in different positions to describe a character. e.g. <i>The curly haired maths teacher... The maths teacher with curly hair.</i></p> <p>- Use show don't tell (inference) to show character feelings. e.g. <i>Sarah's face went pale and her heart froze = scared.</i></p> <p>- Use small details about appearance and personality to build a character. e.g. a character who spits on the floor or wipes his nose on his sleeve is likely to create dislike or disgust. A character who wears a kind smile is likely to be friendly.</p> <p>- Use similes and metaphors to help the reader visualise the character. e.g. <i>Kate's smile was a ray of sunshine upon the grou of friends. Tom was sly like a snake approaching prey.</i></p> <p>- Use correctly punctuated dialogue to build the character. e.g. <i>"Clear off!" snarled Fred between his yellow teeth.</i> Rules: - New speaker, new line. - Dialogue always starts with a capital letter. - Inverted commas around the spoken words. - Comma, exclamation or question mark to separate the speech from the narrative.</p> <p>- Use carefully selected speech verbs to build a character.</p>	<p>Building on Y3/Y4 work:</p> <p>- Carefully select the characters for the written genre. e.g. sci-fi = aliens/robots/scientists. Fairy tale = princess/young child/villains.</p> <p>- Use relative clauses to add detail to the character. e.g. <i>James, who was white as a ghost, shivered in the corner.</i></p> <p>- Use the internal voice of a character alongside rhetorical questions. e.g. <i>Sarah stopped in her tracks. Did I really see a shadow she thought to herself? What on earth was it?</i></p> <p>- Use emotion and personality traits to develop a consistent and believable character. e.g. <i>A kind/caring character will not talk to their friends in a rude way etc..</i></p> <p>- Use dialogue to portray the character and advance actions e.g. <i>"How many times have I told you? Enough is enough! Come inside this VERY minute," shouted his mum. "Just coming!" Jane replied.</i></p> <p>- Use a range of techniques to break up speech when writing including subordination, extra detail, actions to show how the character reacts to dialogue. e.g. <i>Stop right there!" yelled the policeman, trying to get out his whistle...Monty looked him right in the eye.</i></p> <p>- Use reactions and thoughts of other characters towards a main character to build a picture. e.g. <i>'Jamie stared at his friend, shaking his head sadly.' What does Jamie think about his friend's action?</i></p> <p>- Explore how a character's personality and behaviour can impact and drive plot. e.g. <i>a moral flaw or a deep rooted fear will determine how the character reacts in certain situations.</i></p>

e.g. *whimpered* = nervous/in pain. *Bellowed* = cross/attention seeking etc..

- Use pronouns/nouns effectively when describing a character.

e.g. Henry could be – 'he' 'the boy' 'the trouble maker' etc...

Extra ideas/activities:

Use drama activities (thought tracking, conscience alley etc.) to further explore a character's own thoughts, feelings, actions and dilemmas and use this to inform consistency in writing. E.g. how would the same character react to a scary moment, a happy moment, a sad moment etc...

- Explore the use of contrasting characters to develop conflict in narrative.

e.g. *Two siblings, one shy and withdrawn and the other adventurous, find themselves at a crossroads in the narrative – who prevails? At what cost?*

- Explore writing in the first/third person and from different viewpoints to effect characterisation.

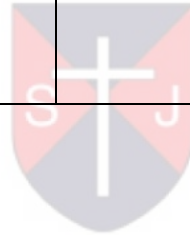
e.g. *if using the first person you may have more empathy and insight into a characters thoughts and feelings.*

- Vary the length of sentences for effect when describing.

E.g. *Longer sentences for descriptive passages and short sentences for impact or effect.*

- Use the setting to show how a character could be feeling.

e.g. *The forest seemed to close in on Jade as the moon faded behind the clouds. She pulled her jacket around her whilst the wind blew a shiver down her spine.*



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