Characters and Characterization

Characters- fictionalized individuals who appear in stories, novels or plays

Character- the aspects of personality, the distinctive traits of an individual

What is a character really like? How do you get to know them as real people?

Flat characters- Minor characters, never developed in depth. We are not given any direct view of their thoughts and we have little information about their attitudes. They don’t do anything to alter the course of events. But they can have an important part in a story. They don’t change, or develop in any way, they are static. They are credible and individualistic not stereotypical but we only see one side of them.

Round characters- Multi-dimensional, we see more than one side of their personality. Round characters have a rich variety of qualities and attitudes. We get to know them well and they seem like real people we know. They are dynamic rather than static. They change their attitudes, grow, develop or weaken under a variety of circumstances. Sometimes the reader’s view of the character changes as you read a book or story. Characters are revealed to you slowly, in layers.

There are three factors present in credible characters. These are consistency, complexity, and individuality.

Consistency makes a character “hang together” in a logical way. Flat characters will always behave in a way that is predictable. Round characters may surprise you but there will always be an explanation for their behavior.

Complexity is what creates a rounded or fully developed character. They are not all good or bad, they are a mixture of maturity and immaturity, innocence and sophistication, self-centeredness and warmth. Some of their attitudes may be contradictory. In fiction, as in real life, an individual can hold two opposing emotions at the same time. Developed characters can change, there can be a basic shift in their personality. The process of how they change is told through the events of the story.

Individuality is what makes a person memorable. We remember people who have a strong set of convictions, a good sense of humor or lead an interesting life. Memorable people are those who knowingly or unknowingly reveal a good deal about their personal feelings. Sophisticated fiction is designed to reveal a good deal about a character very quickly. If you have good insight you will pick up information that makes the character memorable. You will get more out of a novel if you take the time to examine and analyze each rounded character looking at the variety and complexity of their personality.

Various Literary Devices are associated with characterization. The complex nature of characters are revealed to us through: action, dialogue, thoughts, description and exposition. Action- Certain types of action are used to communicate a specific mood. “Action Packed” stories and novels are those which are based on a succession of highly dramatic but familiar scenes but
they are often lacking in the development of character and theme. Action can be used in more sophisticated and subtle ways to tell about characters.

**Dialogue**- What characters say to each other reflects aspects of their personality. (self-assurance, insecurity, egotism, lack of self-esteem etc) It can also reveal a character’s mood. (confident, unsure etc.) When reading dialogue pay attention to who is doing the listening, characters adapt their words depending on the relationship they have with the other characters and the impression they want to make.

**Thoughts**- They reveal aspects of character as well as immediate feelings. Sometimes they show a contrast between what he or she is saying and what is really going through their mind that they don’t want to reveal. Sometimes in a book, a person will be revealed indirectly through a third person who reacts to the character.

**Description**- Sometimes characters are described in ways that give us hints about their personalities or inner concerns. This includes direct descriptions of personal appearance.

**Exposition**- Authors provide factual, incidental information about characters but they usually avoid a direct analysis of the characters. They will rely heavily on action and dialogue to reveal the true nature of their characters. As readers you should be concerned with what characters do and say.

Because books may have many characters, it may be helpful to use a three by five card to keep track of who the characters are and how they are related to each other when you start a new book.

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