

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

To analyze a character, you must find out what makes the character “tick.” As you read, consider the character as you would anyone you meet for the first time. Characterization is an intentional artistic act of the author. It makes a literary work more realistic by helping the reader connect to the characters and the flow of action in the literary work. To discover the nature of a character, carefully consider the character’s personal traits, words, thoughts, feelings, and actions and what the author conveys about the character.

CLUES TO CHARACTER

- physical traits – how the character looks, dresses, moves
- psychological/personality traits – how the character thinks, perceives
- motivations/feelings – what the character says and does that expresses feelings and motives
- behavior/actions – how the character relates to and/or impacts others in the story and how others see/react to him/her
- weaknesses/faults – what are the character’s shortcomings?
- strengths/virtues – what are the character’s positive characteristics?
- moral constitution – how a character responds to issues of right and wrong
- evolution/devolution – whether the character changes during the course of the story; what was his/her motivation? Why?

AUTHOR’S COMMENTARY AND STYLISTIC DEVICES IN CHARACTERIZATION

In order to create lifelike characters, authors are intentional about how they present characters, so consider direct information provided about the character and indirect information (relationships the author creates, changes in the character, diction and symbolism, when and how information is introduced, etc.). Characterization that is authentic and believable also gives contour and tone to the storyline.

- history and background
- expressed similarities and differences between characters
- the words, reactions or thoughts of others shared by the author
- representation of the emotional world of the character(s)
- roles the author assigns to the character(s)
- plot structure and/or symbols used

KEY TERMINOLOGY IN CHARACTER ANALYSIS

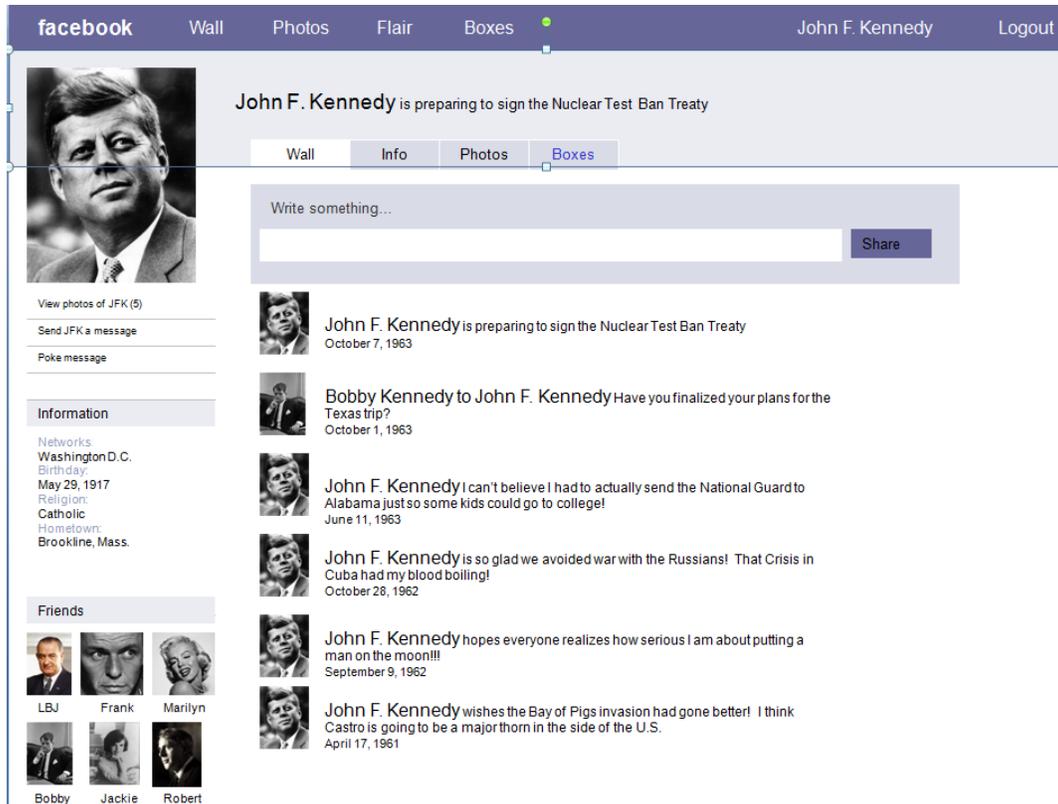
The following are key terms used in character analysis. Before writing your analysis, determine if:

- the character plays a major or minor role in the action in the story
 - Is the character the *protagonist* (hero or heroine) or the *antagonist* (villain or opposing force) in the work?
Janie Crawford is the protagonist in “Their Eyes Were Watching God.”
In “Little Red Riding Hood,” the wolf is the antagonist Red Riding Hood confronts in the woods.
 - Is the character *round* (multi-dimensional) or *flat* (two-dimensional)?
 - Is the character *dynamic* (growing and changing) or *static* (unchanging)?
- the character is used as a *foil* (contrast) to highlight the attributes of a primary character
- the character is a *symbol* (used to represent a vice or virtue) which the author desires to highlight, rather than as a unique personality

Writers experiencing trouble beginning a character analysis may find it useful to try strategies from a clever yet potentially effective approach suggested by educator Matt Amaral in his article “Lesson Plan: Using Facebook Profiles for Character Analysis.” Suggested strategies include:

- considering what kind of concrete object represents a deeper idea or characteristic related to the character you are analyzing; this will be the character’s profile picture
- thinking about who the last five or six people to post on that character’s wall would be and what they would say
- writing an “About Me” paragraph, perhaps including boxes for “Favorite Movies” “Music” and other things that are on the Info page.

For examples of this, visit: <http://techttoolsforschools.blogspot.com/2010/01/facebook-project-template.html>



Additional Resources

- “How to Write a Character Analysis” on *Teaching College English: The Glory and the Challenges* a blog by Professor Suanna Davis
<http://www.teachingcollegeenglish.com/2008/02/28/how-to-write-a-character-analysis-and-a-personnel-review/>
- “Guidelines for Writing a Character Analysis Essay” from the Tidewater Community College Writing Center
http://www.tcc.edu/students/resources/writcent/documents/essay_kinds_docs/character_analysis_essay.pdf