



How to Understand What Characters Are Really Like

KS4 ENGLISH LITERATURE

Ages 11-16 ⌚ 3 min read

What Does a Character's Personality Look Like on the Page?

When you read a book, the author doesn't always stop and say: "This character is brave" or "This person is selfish." Instead, writers show you what characters are like by the things they do, say, and think. Learning to spot these clues is like being a detective—you gather evidence and piece together the full picture of who someone really is.

The best part? You become much better at understanding real people too, because everyone shows their personality through their **actions**, **words**, and **choices**.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

What a character **does** is often the clearest sign of what they're like. If a character runs into a burning building to save someone, that shows they're **brave** and **selfless**. If they steal money from their friend, that shows something about their character too—maybe desperation, dishonesty, or greed.

Think of it like watching your friend at lunch: if they share their crisps with everyone, that shows they're generous. If they hide their food when people come near, that shows they're protective or selfish. You don't need them to announce it—you can see it.

Listen to How They Talk

The way a character **speaks** tells you a lot about them. Do they use formal, fancy language or casual slang? Do they talk a lot or stay quiet? Are they funny, rude, kind, or sarcastic? Some characters might speak differently to different people—being polite to their boss but rude to their family. This **contrast** shows they're dishonest or have hidden sides.

Authors also show what characters think in their **internal monologue**—the thoughts we hear inside their head. A character might smile and say "Yes, that's fine," but their

real thoughts reveal they're angry. This gap between what they say and what they think shows us their true nature.

How Others Treat Them Matters Too

Pay attention to how other characters react to someone. If everyone trusts a character and seeks their advice, that suggests they're wise or dependable. If people avoid someone or seem scared of them, that hints at something darker about their personality.

Think of it like your school: the person everyone goes to for help is probably kind and clever. The person everyone avoids probably isn't kind at all.

Changes Show Character Development

Characters don't always stay the same throughout a book. Some characters **develop** or **change** because of what happens to them. A selfish character might learn generosity. A timid character might discover courage. These changes happen gradually, through their experiences, and they show us how people can transform.

When you finish reading a book, you'll understand characters the same way you understand real friends—through everything they do, say, think, and how they grow.