



# Understanding Why Characters Act the Way They Do

KS2 ENGLISH

LITERATURE

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Ages 10-13



3 min read

## What Makes a Character Tick?

When you read a story, you meet interesting people called **characters**. Sometimes they do things that surprise you or make you wonder why they act that way.

Understanding **character motivation** — the reasons behind what they do — is like being a detective solving a mystery about the person's heart and mind.

Every character has reasons for their actions. Maybe they want something badly, or they're scared, or they've learned something from their past. By figuring out these reasons, stories become much richer and more fun to read.

## Look at Their Background and History

Think about where a character comes from. What happened to them before the story started? Did they grow up poor or rich? Were they loved or treated badly? A character who has experienced hardship might act differently from someone who's had an easy life.

Think of it like planting a seed — the soil it grows in, the amount of sunlight, and the water it gets all affect what kind of plant it becomes. A character's background works the same way.

## Understand Their Goals and Fears

What does your character want more than anything? Do they want to be brave, or find love, or become rich, or help others? **Desires** are powerful drivers of behaviour. At the same time, what are they afraid of? Fear is just as powerful.

A **hero** might act selflessly because they desperately want to protect someone they love. A **villain** might do terrible things because they're terrified of losing power or being forgotten.

Think of it like being hungry at lunch — your desire for food makes you go to the canteen. A character's goals and fears push them forward the same way.

## Pay Attention to Their Choices

Watch what a character chooses to do, especially when they have hard decisions to make. Do they always pick the easy path, or do they sometimes do the right thing even when it costs them? The **choices** characters make tell you who they really are.

When you see a character struggle with a decision, that's gold! It shows you their **values** — what matters most to them. Maybe they choose friendship over winning, or honesty over staying safe.

## Put It All Together

To truly understand a character, combine everything: their past, what they want, what they fear, and the choices they make. Ask yourself: **If I were in their shoes, would I do the same thing?** Even if you wouldn't, you can still understand why they did it.

This skill makes you a better reader and helps you understand real people too!