

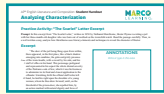
# Analyzing Characterization

## Duration

One 40-minute class session

## Resources

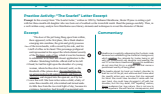
### 1. Student Handout



### 2. Study Guide



### 3. Teacher's Commentary



## Objectives of Lesson

- To explain how a character functions in a text
- To determine why an author crafts a character in a specific way
- To analyze how authorial choices add meaning to a text

## College Board Objectives from the 2019–20 CED

- **CHR1:** Explain the function of character.
- **CHR 1.A:** Identify and describe what specific textual details reveal about a character, that character's perspective, and that character's motives.
- **CHR 1.D:** Describe how textual details reveal nuances and complexities in characters' relationships with one another.

## Student Activities

- Apply Study Guide Strategies to analyze and annotate the excerpt from "The Scarlet Letter."

## How to Use This Lesson

This lesson is designed to give students an opportunity to understand characterization, find it in a passage, and analyze it using active verbs. It provides students with the tools to discuss the author's purpose (see the side box), and it provides a study guide for students that will help them determine what to look for when analyzing characterization. The annotation practice with the Student Handout can happen in class or be sent home for homework. If digital learning is taking place, students can annotate on the Student Handout PDF with a Google Extension like Kami.

- Students need to be able to focus on the author's purpose as they analyze characterization. Basically, the author had intention when he or she wrote a character in a specific way. In each annotation, encourage students to use active verbs to describe what is happening in the section or phrase they are looking at, how the author is making it happen, and why the author chose to write it in this way. It helps to show students a sample and then offer them some verbs to pull from.
- Sample: In sentence one of the excerpt, Hester is led out of the jail by a religious leader with a "black shadow" and a "grim and grisly presence," highlighting Hawthorne's obvious distaste for the regiment of power at the time this text takes place.
- Some verbs students might include while discussing the author's purpose:
  - Highlights
  - Emphasizes
  - Utilizes
  - Demonstrates
  - Juxtaposes
  - Observes
  - Concedes
  - Emphasizes
  - Minimizes
  - Supports
  - Accentuates

Spending time walking students through the Characterization Study Guide is the best place to begin. Ensure that students understand what is in the study guide, and have them read the sample analysis at the end of the study guide, as those annotations model what they will be asked to do in the lesson.

Next, walk students through the prompt at the top of the Student Handout, and read the first sentence of the excerpt together. Then, show them the sample analysis in the side box on this lesson plan. It helps if you write the sample sentence and the verbs on the board and have students expand the verb list with words they offer themselves. These words are just a jumping-off point; the more they add words, the more ownership they will feel.

Next, have students number the methods of characterization (from the Characterization Study Guide) that they find in the text as they read. The numbering system I use is:

- 1. Specific Details/Selection of Detail:** Once they identify a relevant detail that builds character, we narrow it down so students look for elements of the PAIRS acronym from the study guide. I encourage them to find one detail for each part of PAIRS. So an annotation would be labeled "1.P," then they would follow with their analysis.
- 2. Character Motives:** It is fun to point out not only the motives of the main character, Hester, but also of the beadle and the townsfolk.
- 3. Character's Background:** Hester's role as a woman in the Puritan setting is certainly a relevant piece of background information to note.
- 4. Character Growth (or lack thereof):** It will be interesting to see what the students think about Hester sitting in the jail for three months with her baby waiting and planning for this moment. We may not know what she was like before this moment, but we can see her confidence grow as she walks into the crowd.
- 5. Character Foils:** The students will have an easy time contrasting Hester with both the beadle and the townsfolk in their annotations.

Students will read the excerpt and annotate the text with what the author is doing to enhance characterization. For each annotation, they will analyze what the author is doing, how the author is doing it, and why it is important to the author's intent. Be certain that students underline or highlight the verbs that explain the author's purpose (it will make it easier to grade later, and it gets students in the habit of intentionally putting them into their analysis).

In the teacher's commentary, you will be given one example for each of the annotation types above. Students may mark different parts of the text for the same element, so encourage their exploration of the text.

## NOTES

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As an optional follow-up in the next class session, students could work in small groups to share their annotations and compare where they found evidence of the different elements. They could then take a fresh copy of the excerpt and create a master-annotation list as a whole class.

## NOTES

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## Analyzing Characterization

### Practice Activity: “The Scarlet Letter” Excerpt

**Prompt:** In this excerpt from “The Scarlet Letter,” written in 1850 by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hester Prynne is exiting a jail in view of the townsfolk, holding her three-month-old daughter who was born out of wedlock. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Hawthorne uses literary elements and techniques to reveal the character of Hester.

#### Excerpt

“The door of the jail being flung open from within, there appeared, in the first place, like a black shadow emerging into sunshine, the grim and grisly presence  
*Line* of the town-beadle, with a sword by his side, and his  
5 staff of office in his hand. This personage prefigured and represented in his aspect the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law, which it was his business to administer in its final and closest application to the offender. Stretching forth the official staff in his left  
10 hand, he laid his right upon the shoulder of a young woman, whom he thus drew forward; until, on the threshold of the prison-door, she repelled him, by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character, and stepped into the open air, as if by her  
15 own free will. She bore in her arms a child, a baby of some three months old, who winked and turned aside its little face from the too vivid light of day; because its existence, heretofore, had brought it acquainted only with the gray twilight of a dungeon, or other darksome  
20 apartment of the prison.

When the young woman—the mother of this child—stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed to be her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly  
25 affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought or fastened into her dress. In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm, and, with a burning blush,  
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40 allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony.

#### ANNOTATIONS

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The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam, and a face which, besides being beautiful from  
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## Analyzing Characterization

### WHAT IS CHARACTERIZATION?

When writers craft stories, they often begin with a specific character in mind. They know who this person is. They have an idea of what this person looks like, what he believes, where he lives, and how he reacts to the world around him. What the writer then needs to do is place this person into a setting, activate a plot from the deep wells of their mind, and then bring the character to life. In writing life into that character, the author provides **characterization**: the way the character acts, thinks, speaks, and moves. Our job is to then determine *why* the author crafted a character in a certain way and *how* those choices add meaning to the text.

### When Analyzing Characterization, What Should You Be Looking For?

It is important to focus on HOW the character functions within the text and WHY the author made the choices he or she did.

- As you read, you should focus on the **specific details** that an author decides to include. For example, if an author has a character bite her nails when she is stressed, that sends off a vastly different image than if the author has a character twirl her hair around her finger when she is nervous. One detail implies that the character is mildly self-destructive, while the other implies that the character is innocent and child-like. Each choice is strategic.
- Focusing on **character motives**, what motivates the character to move forward in the story, is another way to determine characterization. Is the character moving forward in the plot because they are seeking justice, because they are trying to protect a family member, because they are trying to find true love? Motivations are everywhere in literature, and it is our job, as readers, to look for them and determine not only what they are, but why they matter in relation to the work as a whole.
- Taking note of a **character's background** can offer insight into the perspective of a character. Often, the character's role in society, in history, in a socio-economic sphere can impact the way we view our character's actions and motives. A character breaking patriarchal rules in 21st-century America isn't nearly as impressive as a character breaking patriarchal rules in 18th-century England.
- As the plot of a story progresses, characters will typically undergo some sort of **growth**, or they will intentionally remain stagnant. Either path sends a message from the author to the reader. If a character refuses to learn and the lack of growth clearly annoys the author, chances are we are supposed to learn something from reading this experience.

### NOTES

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The lesson that we are supposed to learn may directly relate to the meaning of the work as a whole.

- As we read, we should watch for **character foils**—characters who operate side by side in a text yet have opposing characteristics. These usually appear in literature in order to highlight the differing characteristics of two characters and to put one character's traits in a positive light. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, Romeo and Mercutio both have differing opinions on love, honor, and revenge. The impetuous nature of Mercutio allows the readers of the play to focus on Romeo's more thoughtful nature regarding Tybalt (prior to Mercutio's murder, of course). With this in mind, we then have to determine what Shakespeare wanted us to learn. Why is this foil necessary, and what do their opposing reactions and motivations reveal? What lessons should we learn?

## Helpful Hints

When analyzing for characterization, it is helpful to know that authors will reveal a character to the reader in one of two ways.

1. **Direct Characterization:** This is where the author specifically states a character's attributes for us.
2. **Indirect Characterization:** This is where the author expects us to do a little detective work. Looking at each of the elements in the following PAIRS acronym can help as we analyze a text for characterization. We should always pay attention to the following and then determine WHY these elements are important and WHAT the author is trying to tell us through these various sections of detail:
  - P: Physical Description:** Pay attention to the appearance and dress of a character. Perhaps that can reveal what they value: think professionalism over comfort.
  - A: Actions:** Pay attention to the way a character acts, especially when nobody is watching. Just like real people, our characters will have strengths and flaws, and these are the moments where we learn so much about our characters and the deeper meanings in a text.
  - I: Inner thoughts:** Just like actions, the inner thoughts of a character can show what the character is really thinking about a subject, a person, or a situation.
  - R: Reactions:** Analyzing how a character reacts to setbacks and failures can often teach us more than watching how a character responds to success. It is important to note how your characters behave in reaction to a stressful scenario.

## NOTES

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**S: Speech:** Analyzing the way one character speaks to another can reveal a lot about their character, especially if the person being addressed comes from a different ethnic or socio-economic background. That is where we learn about power dynamics and meaning of the work as a whole. Also, when one character talks about another character, this is a great chance to learn more about both the speaker and the subject of the dialogue.

## Sample Analysis

In the opening lines of “Wuthering Heights” by Emily Bronte, the narrator Lockwood rides up to the house of his new landlord and meets him for the first time. This is the initial meeting of the two men.

### Passage

He little imagined how **my heart warmed towards him** when I beheld his **black eyes** withdraw so suspiciously under their brows, as I rode up, and when his **fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat as I announced my name.**

①

②

③

## NOTES

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### Analysis

- ① Here we learn more about our narrator, Lockwood, through his own description of Heathcliff. Bronte highlights Lockwood’s naïve nature as he describes his grumpy landlord who breaks social norms and refuses to shake his hand. Yet, Lockwood still admits to his “heart warming” as he reflects on the meeting, which makes Lockwood seem rather foolish.
- ② Bronte ensures that Lockwood both notices and mentions the blackness of Heathcliff’s eyes, which, if we believe the eyes are the windows to the soul, tells us more than we need to know about Heathcliff and his dark soul. This acts as foreshadowing for later in the text when we learn that, indeed, Heathcliff is haunted by a darkness that he cannot overcome.
- ③ Bronte intentionally closes Heathcliff off, even to the act of a civil handshake, portraying his off-putting mannerisms and establishing his isolated nature, and she does it right from the onset of the novel. This not only establishes Heathcliff’s character, it also makes Lockwood look naive for having his “heart warmed” by such a rude gesture.



# Analyzing Characterization

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### Commentary

- ③ Hawthorne is explicitly referencing the Puritanic code because he is establishing the character's background, which solidifies the rationale for Hester being in jail with her three-month old daughter and wearing the red “A” on her dress. Hawthorne ensures his audiences do not miss that this is a religious law that carries a punishment worthy of being jailed.
- ①A The beadle placed his hand on Hester's shoulder to lead her out of the jail, and while we don't know what the specific action was, we know that she removed his hand. She could have brushed it aside with her own hand, she could have shrugged it off with her shoulder, but this tiny detail, this “repelling” motion, shows audiences her true nature. She is not one to be led anywhere. She will face her consequences, and her accusers, on her own terms, highlighting her bold nature.
- ①R Hester's initial reaction to the crowd is to hold her baby close, not to protect the child, but to cover the “A” she is forced to wear. This goes against how most mothers would be expected to react when exposing their baby to the harsh criticism of the Puritanical world. This reaction is so contrary to what one would expect from a mother that Hawthorne is calling to question, in this quick motion, Hester's selfish nature working against her motherly devotion.
- ①I We do not get a lot of Hester's inner thoughts here, but we do see her thinking rationally at this moment. Hawthorne demonstrates Hester's logical nature and her resigned attitude when she realizes that the baby is as much a symbol of shame as the “A” she wears and she shifts the baby's position.
- ② We see that Hester has not only embroidered a letter “A” to wear, as her punishment dictates, but she decorates it in “fantastic flourishes” and “elaborate embroidery.” Her motive behind this action we can only speculate at this point in the excerpt, but based on her repelling of the beadle's hand and her “haughty smile” from a few lines earlier, it is clear that Hawthorne intends to portray Hester as a rebellious force within the Puritanical society and her motivation was to make the townsfolk irritated or angry.

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70 Letter, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself.

- ①.P This physical description of Hester as tall and elegant contrasts her with the beadle from earlier in the passage with his grim and grisly presence.
- ⑤ Within this same section of physical description we learn that Hester's hair, the universal symbol for beauty and sexuality, is "so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam." Hester's fertility, her vibrancy, and her appeal foil the "black shadow" that is used to describe the town-beadle, marking Hawthorne's elevation of Hester above the religious figure in this Puritanical town.
- ④ This is the only glimpse that we get into Hester's past, and it is through the lens of the people who knew her before her imprisonment and the birth of her daughter. They had expected her to emerge "dimmed and obscured," but her emergence from jail as a bold, beautiful woman emphasizes the growth that Hester underwent in jail, thus highlighting Hawthorne's attempt to turn Hester into an empowered female character in a society where empowered women were not welcome.