

Character Overview

Definition:

- Character is any imagined person or being in a story whose behavior, appearance, and thoughts influence the action and advance the author's purpose. Readers make personal connections to stories through characters' experiences.

Character Terms and Traits:

Stock—known already for one outstanding trait such as bravery, cowardice, evil; uncomplicated characters

Round—not easily categorized; behavior, although generally consistent, might be surprising; often have contrasting traits that combine together to make them especially interesting

Flat—character with only one or two essential features, who rarely changes in the story; can still be unique (Tiny Tim)

Archetype—stock character that exists in art and literature of all cultures, thought to represent universal human fears and desires

Anti-hero—protagonist obviously lacking in one or more of the typical hero attributes (bravery, ambition, kindness)

Motivation – reason a character behaves the way he or she does

Examples:

Stock: the Joker, Cinderella

Unique/Round: Forrest Gump, Hamlet

Flat: parents in "Victory Lap," boss in *Office Space*

Archetypes: Earth Mother, hero on a quest

Anti-hero: Holden Caulfield, Napoleon Dynamite

Note: A character can have elements of several of these types. A woman can be an archetypal Earth mother, but have specific traits that make her a round character.

Questions to Ponder:

What is the purpose of the anti-hero in fiction? Why does s/he appeal?

What influences whether or not people change? What examples do we see from the stories we've read?

How do unseen characters influence the main characters in the stories we've read?