

Characterization Vocabulary

alter ego: a literary character or narrator who is a thinly disguised representation of the author, poet, or playwright creating a work (see **authorial voice**)

ancillary characters: (Latin *ancilla*: “helper”) less important characters who are not the primary protagonist or antagonist, but who highlight these characters or interact with them in such a way as to provide insight into the narrative action

antagonist: the character in a narrative who is in conflict with the main character; an antagonist may not even be a person-- or may be the same person as the main character (see **protagonist**)

anti-hero: a protagonist who is the antithesis of the traditional hero-- graceless, inept, stupid, sometimes dishonest, etc.

authorial voice: the voices or speakers used by authors when they seemingly speak for themselves in a book; even if this persona is close (or even seemingly identical) to the author, however, for the purposes of criticism one should treat the authorial voice as a character and not the author him/herself; the narrator in a work written in first person

character: a person, or any thing presented as a person, e.g., a spirit, object, animal, or natural force, in a literary work

characterization: the method a writer uses to reveal the personality of a character in a literary work; personality may be revealed (1) by what the character says about him or herself; (2) by what others reveal about the character; and (3) by the character’s own actions

deuteragonist: a sidekick who accompanies the main protagonist, the main character or hero, in a narrative

dynamic character: one whose personality changes or evolves over the course of a narrative or appears to have the capacity for such change (see **static character**)

flat character: a character who is not fully developed by an author; a character who has only one outstanding trait or feature, or at the most a few distinguishing marks (a stereotype or caricature); flat characters are there to fulfill a specific role in a narrative, and they seldom seem truly alive to a reader

foil: character who provides a contrast to another character, thus emphasizing the other’s traits; a character in a play who sets off the main character or other characters by comparison

narrator: the “voice” that speaks or tells a story’ some narratives are written in a first-person point of view, in which the narrator’s voice is that of the point-of-view character

narrator, unreliable: a narrator who “misses the point” of the events or things s/he describes in a story, who plainly misinterprets the motives or actions of characters, or who fails to see the connections between events in the story; the author herself, of course, must plainly understand the

connections, because she presents the material to the readers in such a way that readers can see what the narrator overlooks; this device is sometimes used for purposes of irony or humor

persona: the mask worn by an actor in Greek drama; in a literary context, the persona is the character of the first-person narrator in verse or prose narratives, and the speaker in lyric poetry; the use of the term “persona” (as distinct from “author”) stresses that the speaker is part of the fictional creation, invented for the author’s particular purposes in a given literary work (see **authorial voice**)

point of view: the way a story gets told and who tells it. It is the method of narration that determines the position, or angle of vision, from which the story unfolds; point of view governs the reader’s access to the story; many narratives appear in the **first person** (the narrator speaks as “I” and the narrator is a character in the story who may or may not influence events within it); another common type of narrative is the **third person** narrative (the narrator seems to be someone standing outside the story who refers to all the characters by name or as he, she, they, and so on); when the narrator reports speech and action, but never comments on the thoughts of other characters, it is the dramatic third person point of view or objective point of view; the third-person narrator can be **omniscient**-- a narrator who knows everything that needs to be known about the agents and events in the story, and is free to move at will in time and place, and who has privileged access to a character’s thoughts, feelings, and motives; the narrator can also be **limited**-- a narrator who is confined to what is experienced, thought, or felt by a single character, or at most a limited number of characters; occasionally a narration may use **second person**, in which the reader is the main character (uses the pronoun “you”)

protagonist: the main character in a story

round character: a fully developed character; character who is complex, multi-dimensional, and convincing

static character: a character who is the same sort of person at the end of a story as s/he was at the beginning

stereotype: an author’s method of treating a character so that the character is immediately identified with a group; a character may be associated with a group through accent, food choices, style of dress, or any readily identifiable group characteristic; examples are the rugged cowboy, the bearded psychiatrist, and the scarred villain; sometimes these can be ethnic or racial stereotypes; if used unintentionally they are often criticized, but stereotypes can also be used for humorous or ironic purposes (often to criticize the stereotypes themselves) (see **stock character**)

stock character: fictional character based on a common literary or social stereotype; they rely heavily on cultural types or names for their personality, manner of speech, etc. (see **stereotype**)

tritagonist: in the earliest Greek dramas, the play consisted of a single actor standing on stage speaking and singing to the chorus; later, a second actor (called the deuteragonist) was added by literary innovators, and later a third actor (called the tritagonist); in modern literary discussions, the term tritagonist is used to refer to any ancillary character who aids the protagonist, but who does not serve as a deuteragonist (a constant side-kick or companion)