



Characterisation toolkit

© Pie Corbett, 2017



To create characters that sound real and the reader can imagine you might want to:

N/R	Y1/2 As in N/R plus:	Y3/4 As in Y1/2 plus:	Y5/6 As in Y3/4 plus:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write about a character from a story you know or make up a new character • Give your character a name • Use adjectives to describe e.g. <i>friendly, scary</i> and use a simile – using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> e.g. <i>with wrinkles like a walnut</i> • Have a ‘goodie’ and a ‘baddie’ • Give your character a problem • End with ‘happily ever after’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use simple similes to describe e.g. <i>He stood as tall as a tree</i> • Use sentence or power of 3 e.g. <i>Santa was red, fat and friendly.</i> • Use adverbs to describe how something does something e.g. <i>she tiptoed quietly</i> • Use adjectives to describe a noun with a comma (simple noun phrases), e.g. <i>a small, round ball</i> • Introduce bits of alliteration e.g. <i>Sally slept silently</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show not tell – describe a character’s emotions using senses, e.g. the effect on the character’s body – <i>a shiver shot up her spine</i> • Give your main character a hobby, interest or special talent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Shiv kept a pet rat called Simon in a cage made of bamboo shoots</i> - an expression for speech, e.g. <i>‘Rats!’ she cried</i> - something they love or hate or fear, e.g. <i>Carol had always been afraid of the dark</i> - a distinctive feature, e.g. <i>she wore scarlet jeans</i> - a secret • Know your character’s desire, wish or fear, e.g. <i>Gareth had always wanted a pet/ never liked lizards.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a name to suggest the character, e.g. <i>Mr Hardy</i> [strong and tough], <i>Miss Honey</i> [gentle] • Drop in a few details to suggest character, e.g. <i>Mr Simons, gripping his cane, glared at the two boys.</i> • Show (not tell) how characters feel by what they do, think or say, e.g. <i>“Get out!” he snapped, slamming the door. (to show anger)</i> • Reveal a character’s thoughts, e.g. <i>He hoped that he would find his way home.</i> • Use other character’s (or the narrator’s) comments or reactions, e.g. <i>‘Tracy’s upset again,’ whispered Jamil.</i> • Use contrasting main characters & show how a character feels on the inside whilst pretending something else. • Show character development – how they feel at the start and end of a story, e.g. <i>Mrs Bonny frowned. [Opening] Mrs Bonny turned to her new-found friend and smiled. [Ending]</i>

Useful ideas for teaching characterisation – always co-construct the toolkit with the class



Model all aspects of the toolkit and display word banks, sentences and ideas on prompt cards, washing lines or learning walls

N/R	Y1/2 As in N/R plus:	Y3/4 As in Y1/2 plus:	Y5/6 As in Y3/4 plus:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect a bank of characters from reading • Notice, collect and use descriptive language • Ask class to sort characters into goodies and baddies • Discuss how characters feel and find clues in the text or images • Discuss dilemmas for characters • Role-play scenes in stories • Invent new characters together • Use hats, costumes and puppets to retell or invent stories with strong central characters • Draw characters on story map 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From reading, create 'role on the wall', collecting character clues and tracking development • Add speech or thought bubbles to pictures • Collect, display and use a bank of descriptive language (adjectives & similes) • Use drama/ mime/ play 'in the manner of the word' to show how a character feels, e.g. <i>walked sadly</i> • Create banks of words to describe how a character feels • Draw characters + speech bubbles • Role-play brief conversations before writing dialogue • Use freeze frames, hot seat and interview characters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice and collect ideas for how authors develop characters through what they say, do and thin • Use reading and images to collect banks of words or phrases to draw on when writing for feelings, e.g. <i>scared – shivered, spine tingle, legs shook, tremble</i> • act out simple scenes with different characters, e.g. <i>coming into a room angrily, shyly, bossily, etc.</i> • Use drama to re-enact or develop new scenes • Collect character triggers, e.g. <i>a secret, a wish, a fear, finding something, an anxiety, a dream, losing something, a lie, etc.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play games where children mime and others have to guess – who and how they feel • Write dialogue for images of films with the sound turned down • Collect banks of names and idioms/expressions • Look at images of people and write banks of details to describe faces, hands, eyes, mouths, teeth, etc. • In reading, discuss how authors build characters and show/suggest feelings • Use drama to develop 'show not tell'. Act out scenes, changing a character's feelings, e.g. how does a bossy character answer the door or a shy one? • Rehearse changing sections of good writing by altering the character type thinking about what a different character would say, do or think; • Read and imitate good writers. Borrow characters and write new stories for them.