

Character

You know you've read a good book when you turn the last page and feel a little as if you have lost a friend.

Copy the following terms in your composition book.

- static: stay the same throughout
- dynamic: changes his or her mind, thoughts, beliefs
- round: multiple characteristics
- flat: one character trait
- protagonist: main character
- antagonist: opposes the main character
- foil: character who brings out the opposite characteristics in another
- direct characterization: an author straight-out tells the reader what a character is like

indirect characterization: an author shows us what a

Components of Characterization

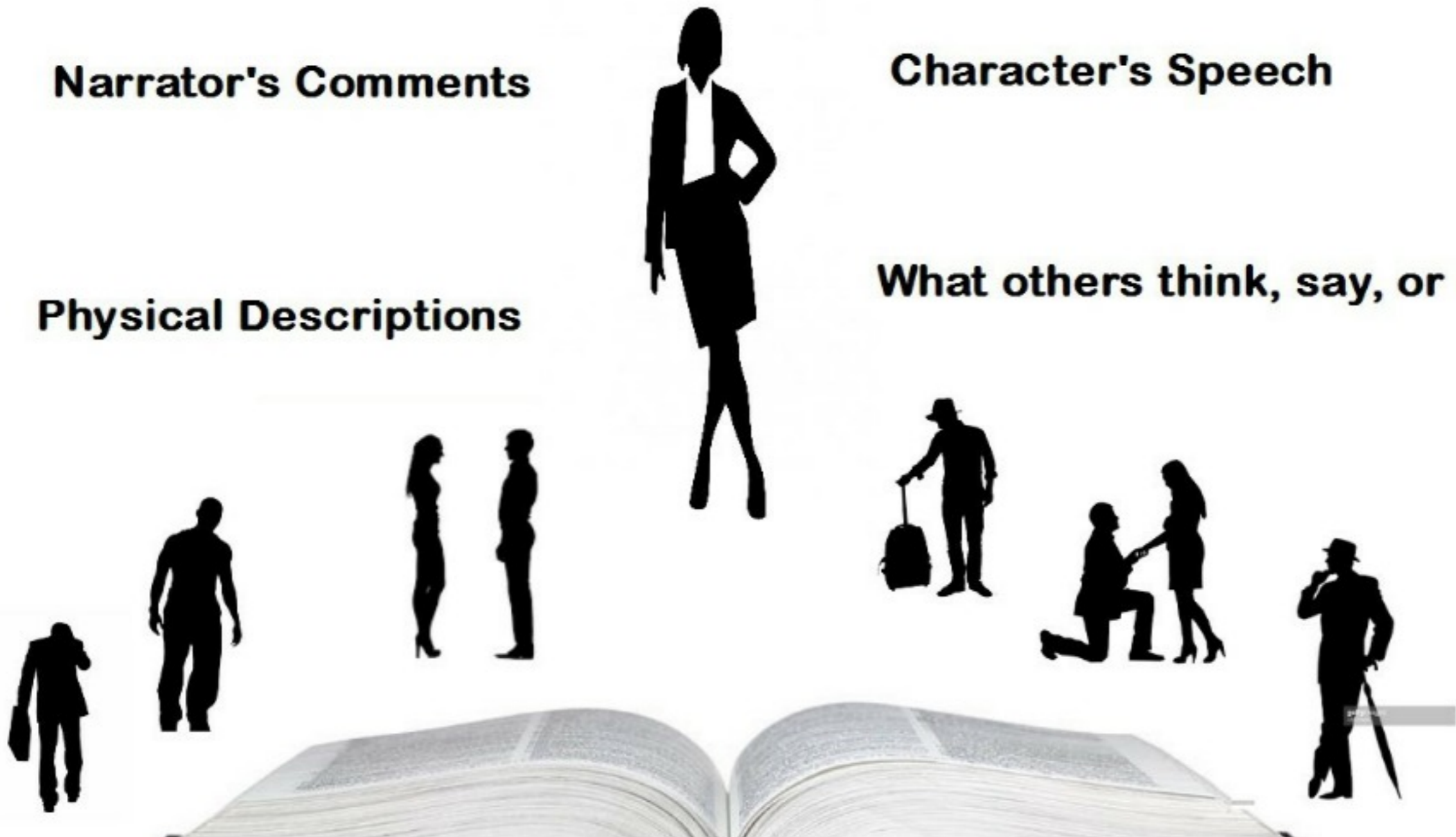
Thoughts, Feelings, Actions

Narrator's Comments

Character's Speech

Physical Descriptions

What others think, say, or do



Narrator's Presentation:

She was one of those pretty and charming girls born, as though fate had blundered over her, into a family of artisans. She had no marriage portion, no expectations, no means of getting known, understood, loved, and wedded by a man of wealth and distinction; and she let herself be married off to a little clerk in the Ministry of Education. Her tastes were simple because she had never been able to afford any other, but she was as unhappy as though she had married beneath her; for women have no caste or class, their beauty, grace, and charm serving them for birth or family, their natural delicacy, their instinctive elegance, their nimbleness of wit, are their only mark of rank, and put the slum girl on a level with the highest lady in the land.



Character's Appearance

Billy the Kid

- *Height: five feet, seven inches*
- *Weight: 125lbs*

Physical appearance is an important part of character, but it is only significant when it reveals personality, pushes the plot, or helps to shape a theme. This physical description of Billy the Kid provides essential information, but we do not know about his personality.



He was tall and well-built with the wide-shouldered look of an athlete. The snug fit of his dark suit revealed a muscular build.

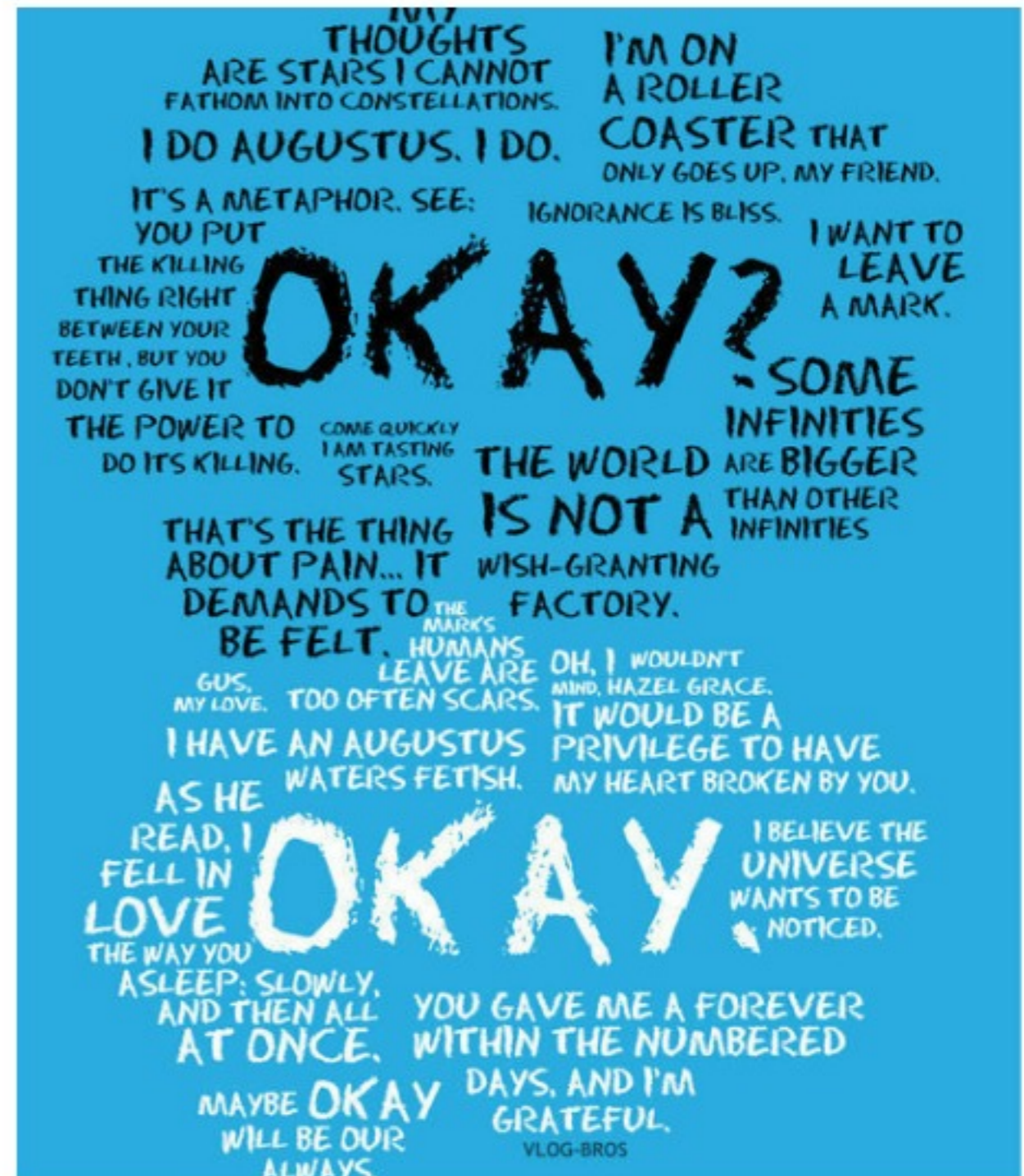
While this does not directly reveal his personality, the physical description could be used to populate several inferences: he works hard; he is vain. We can also ask several questions about his past based on this description. Is he a businessman on the way to the health club? A recently discharged ex-marine?

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

from *The Fault In Our Stars* by John Green

A boy was staring at me. I was quite sure I'd never seen him before. Long and leanly muscular, he dwarfed the molded plastic elementary school chair he was sitting in. Mahogany hair, straight and short. He looked my age, maybe a year older, and he sat with his tailbone against the edge of the chair, his posture aggressively poor, one hand half in a pocket of dark jeans.

I looked away, suddenly conscious of my myriad insufficiencies. I was wearing old jeans, which had once been tight but now sagged in weird places, and a yellow T-shirt advertising a band I didn't even like anymore. Also my hair: I had this pageboy haircut, and I hadn't even bothered to,



Quiz



What can be inferred about the boy based on his physical description?

- He is trying to impress the narrator.
- He is handsome.
- He has an average intelligence.
- He is nervous about what is happening around him.



In this passage, the speaker judges herself by comparing herself to the boy. What inference can be made about how she feels?

- She thinks her boyish look might make him notice her.
- She recognizes the boy's indifference toward her by his posture.
- The comparison gives her hope: They have similar appearances.
- The boy's appearance emphasizes her insecurities and low self-esteem.

Character's Actions

"People express their souls in their actions."

If characters are merely described, then the story will read more like an essay. Characters must be dramatized with *actions*, thoughts, feelings

She lunged forward, desperately trying to grab the vase before it crashed to the floor. If the vase is shattered, she and the other servants would have to bear the wrath of the master.



Actions tell the story. They reveal a woman who is fearful of her employer and concerned for those who work with her.



Character's Thoughts

The basis for most action is thought, and the thoughts of characters reveal important information about themselves and others.

Look at this sample of Arnold's thoughts, which he expresses out loud.

Just \$25 more, and I can afford to buy the land, thinks Arnold. Years of working hard are finally going to pay off. For the first time I'll be my own boss. I won't have to answer to anyone but myself. I'll own my own land. I'll grow cotton, or maybe corn, to sell for profit. Never again will I work for another. Just \$25 more. That's all I need.

Without saying it, we learn that Arnold has been a farmhand, watching others profit from his labor. He's determined to control his own future as a landowner.

Character's Speech

Next to actions, speech reveals more about character than anything else.

George turned to David and said, "It isn't going to work. We can't save this project and bring in a profit. It's time to pull out or sell."

"We can't," David noted. "We have commitments."

George responded, lost in thought, "I'm not spending anymore money on this project. Just get the work done. I don't care how you do it. Just get it done!"

David knew this was the end of the friendship and partnership. He turned to George and said, "That's it. Call my lawyer. I'm dissolving this partnership. I'm not willing to put people in danger or to risk their money so I can make a profit."

Speech is the fingerprint of personality. Likes, dislikes, background, moods, needs, levels of education, etc. can all be revealed. George and David are obviously very different.



SPEECH, THOUGHTS, AND ACTIONS from To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Miss Maudie hated her house: time spent indoors was time wasted. She was a widow, a chameleon lady who worked in her flower beds in an old straw hat and men's coveralls, but after her five o'clock bath she would appear on the porch and reign over the street in magisterial beauty.

She loved everything that grew in God's earth, even the weeds. With one exception. If she found a blade of nut grass in her yard it was like the Second Battle of the Marne: she swooped down upon it with a tin tub and subjected it to blasts from beneath with a poisonous substance she said was so powerful it'd kill us all if we didn't stand out of the way.



Quiz



What can most likely be inferred from the description of Miss Maudie as “a chameleon lady”?

- She wears a lot of colorful clothing.
- She often works outside in the garden.
- She lives a colorful and unpredictable life.
- She is adaptable to many scenarios.



Which aspect of Miss Maudie's characterization is revealed from the following line: "a chameleon lady who worked in her flower beds in an old straw hat and men's coveralls, but after her five o'clock bath she would appear on the porch and reign over the street in magisterial beauty."

- She is wise and controlling.
- She is elegant and energetic.
- She is alone and fair-minded.
- She is unapproachable and hard-working.

Character development is mostly explored through

- the character's physical descriptions.
- the character's dialogue.
- the character's actions.
- the character's thoughts.



OTHER CHARACTERS' THOUGHTS & SPEECH

We can also learn about a character by observing what others say about him or her, how others treat him or her, what others think about him or her.

Margo drove in her usual reckless manner as she complained to Paul.

"A cheerleader, a captain no less. Even honor society...in the top 10 percent of her class!"

"What does that have to do with anything? You don't have to be brainless and unpopular to be a shoplifter," Paul said. "I know that," Margo said. "But why my sister, after the kind of upbringing she's had?"

"Just goes to show you can't judge a book by its cover."

Quiz



What can be inferred about Janice based on the conversation between Margo and Paul?

- This type of behavior is unusual for Janice.
- Janice's behavior is a result of peer pressure.
- Janice feels badly about her recent behavior.
- Janice's behavior lacks virtue and responsibility.



What does Paul's reaction to Margo's complaining suggest about his character?

- Paul has shoplifted in the past.
- Paul appears indecisive about Janice's behavior.
- Paul sympathizes with Janice.
- Paul has unwavering morals.



What can you infer about how Margo feels about her own reputation?

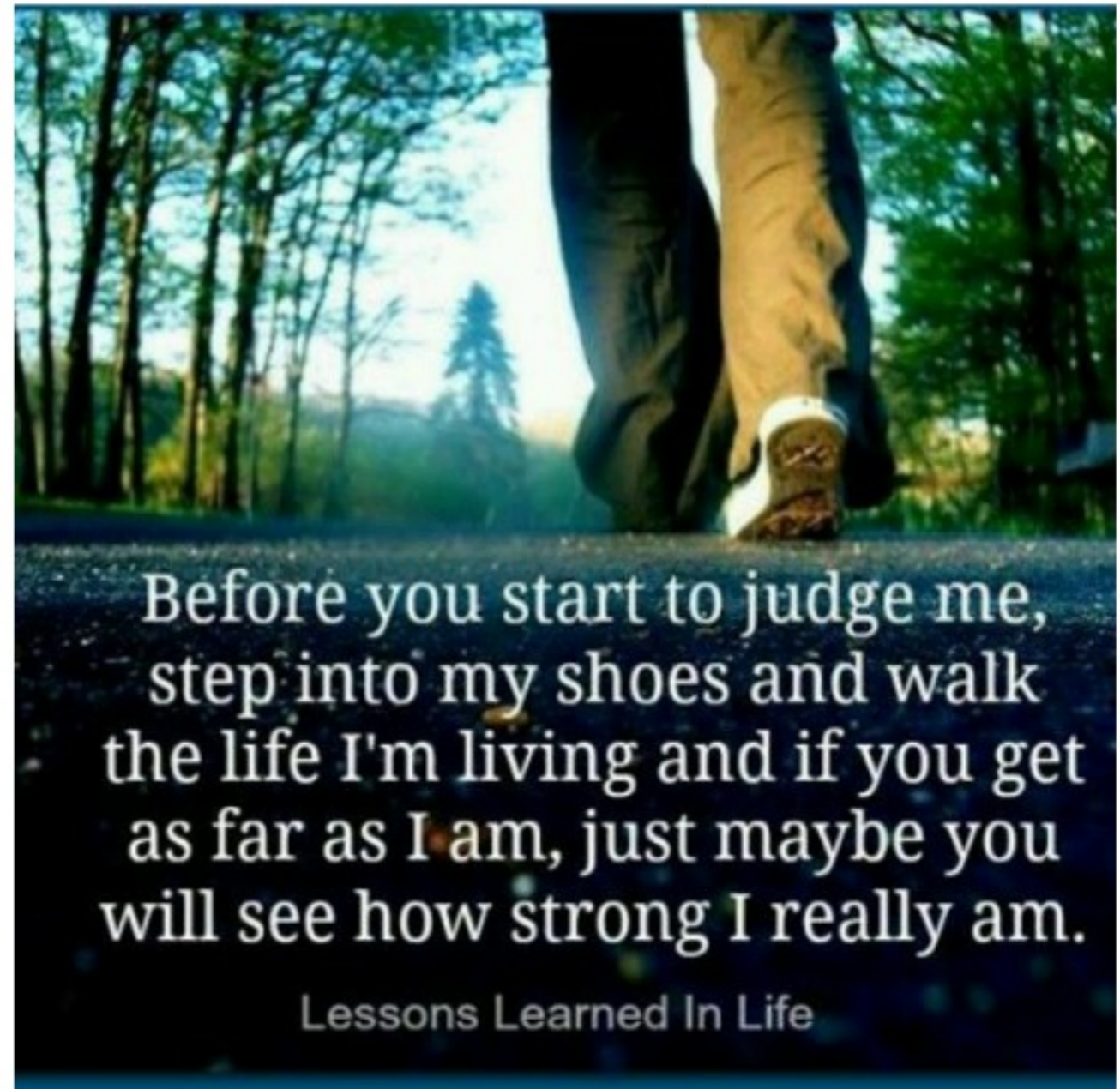
- Margo wants her sister's actions to aid in her own popularity.
- Margo does not care about her reputation.**
- Margo believes that her sister's behavior will make her more popular.
- Margo does not want her sister's actions to reflect poorly on her family.

Character Motivation

Authors of literary fiction use these components to develop characters that seem incredibly real—no matter how much they suffer, no matter how heavy love fills their hearts, no matter what circumstances they encounter.

The reader must then analyze the components of characterization to determine why they act the way they act, say the things they say, and think the way they think.

That's no easy task. Good readers must keep in mind that the characters about which they read likely weren't born in 2018, weren't born in Ballantyne, and weren't exposed to SpongeBob and cell phones. We have to leave popular culture



from The Egg by Sherwood Anderson Character Motivation

It was in the spring of his thirty-fifth year that father married my mother, then a country school-teacher, and in the following spring I came wriggling and crying into the world. Something happened to the two people. They became ambitious. The American passion for getting up in the world took possession of them.

It may have been that mother was responsible. Being a school-teacher she had no doubt read books and magazines. She had, I presume, read of how Garfield, Lincoln, and other Americans rose from poverty to fame and greatness and as I lay beside her--in the days of her lying-in--she may have dreamed that I would some day rule men and cities. At any rate she induced father to give up his place as a farm-hand, sell his horse and embark on an independent enterprise of his

Quiz



How does the narrator's birth change his parents?

- The narrator's birth filled his parents with anxiety and fear.
- The narrator's birth filled his parents with ambition and desire.
- The narrator's birth filled his parents with worry and doubt.
- The narrator's birth filled his parents with motivation and determination.



Reread the underlined text. What does the text tell you about the mother's motivation for convincing her husband to give up farming?

- She was motivated by stories of historical figures who rose from poverty.
- She was motivated by her own life.
- She was motivated by her dreams for her son.
- She was motivated by her fear of her son becoming just like her.

Character Stems

1. Are the characters static, dynamic, round, flat?
2. Are the characters physically described? Are their names significant?
3. Do they stand for something, such as honesty, arrogance, or power, or are we interested in their psychology?
4. Do certain characters garner our sympathy or lack of sympathy? Does the author clearly favor one character over the other?
5. Is the character presented directly (tells) or indirectly (shows through action or words)?
6. How do the characters contribute to the theme?