

## Types of Characters and Character Traits

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**characters:** the people, animals, or imaginary creatures in a work of literature

**protagonist:** the main or most important character in a work of literature

**minor character:** less important character, helps move the action forward and helps readers learn about the main character(s)

**character traits:** qualities of a character, such as his or her personality

### HERE'S HOW

**Step 1: Identify a protagonist.** Look for the individual who is at the center of the action. In the examples below, Elsa is the story's main character.

**Step 2: Identify a minor character.** Look for an individual who is less important than the main character. In the examples below, Jim is a minor character.

**Step 3: Identify character traits.** As you read, think of adjectives for the character's traits. Writers use four main methods to reveal a character's traits:

- **Direct Comments** about the character's personality traits by the narrator.

**EXAMPLE** Elsa had the simple candor of someone who has spent most of her life around people who loved her. (*Character traits: simplicity, honesty, innocence*)

- **Physical Description** of a character's appearance.

**EXAMPLE** She noticed quickly that, not only was she the youngest in the room, but was wearing tweed and khaki instead of sequins, clothes more suited to a college interview than a party. (*Character traits: young, unused to formality, naive*)

- **Speech, Actions, or Thoughts** of a character.

**EXAMPLE** When a young man in a satin dinner jacket approached, Elsa felt awkward and tongue-tied. "I . . . I . . . guess I need some fresh air," she blurted out and darted for the door. (*Character traits: insecurity, self-consciousness, shyness*)

- **How Others React** to the character.

**EXAMPLE** Jim, who had known Elsa all her life, followed her out. But even he was surprised when she took off running. He was more shocked still to find he couldn't keep up with her. (*Character traits: impulsive, athletic*)

**Step 4: Make inferences about traits.** Ask yourself, "What kind of person would think, feel, talk, behave, or interact with others in this way?" Express your answers in one of two ways: This character is \_\_\_\_\_, or this character displays the trait of \_\_\_\_\_.

noun    adjective

## 1

**Types of Characters and  
Character Traits****from "Through the Tunnel"**  
**by Doris Lessing**

He looked down into the blue well of water. He knew he must find his way through that cave, or hole, or tunnel, and out the other side.

First, he thought, he must learn to control his breathing. He let himself down into the water with another big stone in his arms, so that he could lie effortlessly on the bottom of the sea. He counted. One, two, three. He counted steadily. He could hear the movement of blood in his chest. Fifty-one, fifty-two. . . . His chest was hurting. He let go of the rock and went up into the air. He saw that the sun was low. He rushed to the villa and found his mother at her supper. She said only "Did you enjoy yourself?" and he said "Yes."

All night the boy dreamed of the water-filled cave in the rock, and as soon as breakfast was over he went to the bay.

That night, his nose bled badly. For hours he had been underwater, learning to hold his breath, and now he felt weak and dizzy. His mother said, "I shouldn't overdo things, darling, if I were you."

That day and the next, Jerry exercised his lungs as if everything, the whole of his life, all that he would become, depended upon it. Again his nose bled at night, and his mother insisted on his coming with her the next day. It was a torment to him to waste a day of his careful self-training, but he stayed with her on that other beach. . . .

## LESSON

## 1

## PRACTICE WORKSHEET A

## COPYMASTER

## Types of Characters and Character Traits

**Directions:** Read the passage. Fill in the graphic organizer with traits for the protagonist, Rani. Then, answer the questions about Rani below the chart.

From the wings, Rani heard the other actor finishing his audition speech. Soon it would be her turn. Back in her apartment wondering what to wear. Sick with indecision at almost any everyday choice, she was thrown by the import. She had gone for all black, which along with her ghost-white skin, made a cheerless impression. But now she had passed all that—no turning back. She felt calmer. The actor onstage finished his speech and walked past her, shaking his head glumly. Rani guessed that it hadn't gone well for him, and her heart took a deep dive. Then the director called her name. Rani took a breath, stood up straight, pinned on a smile, and strode onstage, and bumped right into a chair that the other actor had forgotten to put back. She tripped and tumbled onto the floor. There were a few sympathetic "Oh dear's." But Rani jumped up, bowed, and said, "Thank you! And now, for my *next* trick. . . ." When the laughter and applause washed over her, she relaxed and sailed confidently into her audition speech.

Method of Revealing Character	Quotations from Story	Character Traits Revealed
Narrator's Direct Statements About Rani	"Sick with indecision at almost any everyday choice, she was thrown by the import."	1.
Rani's Physical Appearance	"She had gone for all black, which along with her ghost-white skin, made a cheerless impression."	2.
Rani's Thoughts, Words, And Actions	"Rani took a breath, stood up straight, pinned on a smile, and strode onstage, and bumped right into a chair. . . . She tripped and tumbled onto the floor" "But Rani jumped up, bowed, and said, 'Thank you! And now for my <i>next</i> trick.'"	3.
Reactions of Other Characters to Rani	" . . . laughter and applause washed over her"	4.

4. Describe Rani, in two sentences, mentioning her chief personality traits as portrayed in this passage. \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your opinion of Rani? \_\_\_\_\_

