



Writing Skills

Character Descriptions

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Character Descriptions

This writing activity is user-friendly for both students and teachers/tutors/speech language pathologists. It not only teaches students how to write a sophisticated and comprehensive character description essay, but also shows students how they can infer information about a character's personality and perspective from that character's actions and dialogue. Given a short novel excerpt, students are first tasked with attributing adjectives to one of the characters by analyzing his actions and words, and then they use those adjectives to write a character description by following a written scaffold. This strategy and scaffold can apply to almost any character analysis writing assignment. Included are extensive notes on the provided excerpt and a sample character analysis essay following the scaffold to aid in instruction.

Name _____

Date _____

Novel Excerpt from *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes

Background: Louisa and Patrick live in England and are girlfriend and boyfriend. Louisa has just lost her job and is looking for some sympathy from Patrick.

Excerpt:

He was down at the athletics club, as I had known he would be Mondays to Thursdays, regular as a station timetable, Patrick was there in the gym or running in circles around the floodlit track.

“Run with me,” he puffed, as he got closer. His breath came in pale clouds. “I’ve got four laps to go.”

“I wasn’t expecting you.”

“I got fed up at home. I thought maybe we could do something.”

He looked sideways at me. There was a fine film of sweat on his face. “The sooner you get another job, babe, the better.”

“It’s all of twenty-four hours since I lost the last one. Am I allowed to just be a bit miserable and floppy? You know, just for today?”

“But you’ve got to look at the positive side. You knew you couldn’t stay at that place forever. You want to move upward, onward.” Patrick had been named Stortfold Young Entrepreneur of the Year two years previously, and had not yet quite recovered from the honor. . . . “Being made redundant can change people’s lives, Lou.” He glanced at his watch, checking his lap time. “What do you want to do? You could retrain. I’m sure they do a grant for people like you.”

“People like me?”

“People looking for a new opportunity. What do you want to be? You could be a beautician. You’re pretty enough.” He nudged me as we ran, as if I should be grateful for the compliment.

“You know my beauty routine. Soap, water, the odd paper bag.”

Patrick was beginning to look exasperated.

I was starting to lag behind. I hate running. I hated him for not slowing down.

Notes for Novel Excerpt from *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes

Background: Louisa and Patrick live in England and are girlfriend and boyfriend. Louisa has just lost her job and is looking for some sympathy from Patrick. ***Here you can discuss perspective taking by examining Louisa's point of view.***

Excerpt:

He was down at the athletics club, as I had known he would be Mondays to Thursdays, regular as a station timetable, ***(discuss meaning of "regular as a station timetable")***

Patrick was there in the gym or running in circles around the floodlit track. (rigid)

"Run with me," he puffed, as he got closer. His breath came in pale clouds. "I've got four laps to go." (rigid/inflexible)

"I wasn't expecting you."

"I got fed up at home. I thought maybe we could do something."

He looked sideways at me. There was a fine film of sweat on his face. "The sooner you get another job, babe, the better." (unsympathetic/pushy)

"It's all of twenty-four hours since I lost the last one. Am I allowed to just be a bit miserable and floppy? You know, just for today?" ***(Discuss how she's looking for a little sympathy, how she's asking for a little time to feel sorry for herself.)***

(unsympathetic/insensitive) "But you've got to look at the positive side. You knew you couldn't stay at that place forever. You want to move upward, onward." Patrick had been named Stortfold Young Entrepreneur ***(define "entrepreneur")*** of the Year two years previously, and had not yet quite recovered from the honor. ***(Discuss what "not yet quite recovered from the honor" means)*** (egotistical/conceited) ... "Being made redundant can change people's lives, Lou." He glanced at his watch, checking his lap time. (rigid) "What do you want to do? You could retrain. I'm sure they do a grant for people like you." (condescending)

"People like me?"

"People looking for a new opportunity. What do you want to be? You could be a beautician. You're pretty enough." He nudged me as we ran, as if I should be grateful for the compliment. (condescending)

"You know my beauty routine. Soap, water, the odd paper bag." ***(Discuss what Louisa means by this, and what it reveals about her character.)***

Patrick was beginning to look exasperated. (impatient/unsympathetic)

I was starting to lag behind. I hate running. I hated him for not slowing down. (rigid/unyielding/uncaring)



Name _____

Date _____

Analyzing Literature: Character Description

Directions: Write a paragraph in which you comprehensively describe a literary character (Note: Being “comprehensive” means giving a good amount of information. Go into some depth with your analysis.)

Start with:

“In the excerpt from the novel _____ by _____,
(title) (author)
_____ is depicted as _____,
(character’s name) (adjective) (adjective)
and _____.”
(adjective)

Continue with:

“One example of _____’s _____ is when/how ...”
(name) (adjective turned into noun)
(be comprehensive!)

“This demonstrates/reveals/shows ...” *(be comprehensive)*

“An example of his/her _____ is when/how ...”
(adjective turned into noun)
(be comprehensive)

“This demonstrates/reveals/shows ...” *(be comprehensive)*

“Lastly, an example of his/her _____ is when/how”
(adjective turned into noun)
(be you-know-what)

“This demonstrates/reveals/shows ...” *(you know the drill!)*



Analyzing Literature: Character Description Sample

Write a paragraph in which you comprehensively describe a literary character.

Start with:

In the excerpt from the novel *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes, Patrick is depicted as rigid, egotistical, and condescending.

Continue with:

One example of Patrick's rigidity is when his girlfriend goes to find him at the athletics club and knew that he would be there because his schedule was as "regular as a station timetable". **This demonstrates** how Patrick sticks to his schedule so consistently that his girlfriend knew exactly where he would be at a certain time. The phrase "regular as a station timetable" shows how the author compares Patrick to a printed schedule that follows arrival and departure times to the minute, thereby emphasizing Patrick's predictability and rigidity.

An example of his egotistical nature is when it is revealed that he won an award for his town's Entrepreneur of the Year two years earlier and "had not yet quite recovered from the honor", meaning his head was still swelled from receiving the award. **This shows** how his response to winning an award is to feel like he is so great. In fact, during Patrick's conversation with his girlfriend Louisa around the running track, each time he gives her advice it seems that he thinks he knows best, and feels that since he is successful in his business ventures he is superior to her.

Lastly, an example of his condescension is how Patrick talks to Louisa about getting a new job. He says, "you could retrain. I'm sure they do a grant for people like you", making it sound as though he knows better than she does, and also as though she belongs to an inferior class. He also states, "you could be a beautician. You're pretty enough." Telling your girlfriend she's "pretty enough" is not much of a compliment, and **this shows** Patrick's condescending attitude toward Louisa, since he appears to think she would be grateful for the lukewarm compliment!