

Direct Characterization

Definition of Direct Characterization

Direct [characterization](#) means the way an author or another [character](#) within the story describes or reveals a character, through the use of descriptive adjectives, epithets, or phrases. In other words, direct characterization happens when a writer reveals traits of a character in a straightforward manner, or through comments made by another character involved with him in the storyline.

Direct characterization helps the readers understand the type of character they are going to read about. For instance, in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, he describes his character John Proctor in this way: "He was the kind of man – powerful of body, even-tempered, and not easily led – who cannot refuse support to partisans without drawing their deepest resentment."

Examples of Direct Characterization in Literature

Example #1: *The Most Dangerous Game* (By Richard Connell)

"The first thing Rainsford's eyes discerned was the largest man Rainsford had ever seen – a gigantic creature, solidly made and black bearded to the waist. ...

" 'Ivan is an incredibly strong fellow,' remarked the general, 'but he has the misfortune to be deaf and dumb. A simple fellow, but, I'm afraid, like all his race, a bit of a savage.' "

The above passage shows a good example of a direct characterization. Here Zaroff has explicitly described another character Ivan in the story *The Most Dangerous Game*, leaving readers with no more questions about him. Ivan

is a muscular, huge man, having a long black beard. He is deaf and dumb, yet strong, Zaroff says.

Example #2: *The Old Man and the Sea* (by Ernest Hemingway)

“The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. The brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings from its reflection on the tropic sea were on his cheek ... Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.”

Hemingway uses the method of direct characterization to describe the old man's personality traits, especially the vivid eyes of his main character, the old man, Santiago in his novel.

Example #3: *Hedda Gabler* (by Henrik Ibsen)

“MISS JULIANA TESMAN, with her bonnet on a carrying a parasol, comes in from the hall, followed by BERTA, who carries a bouquet wrapped in paper. MISS TESMAN is a comely and pleasant-looking lady of about sixty-five. She is nicely but simply dressed in a grey walking-costume. BERTA is a middle-aged woman of plain and rather countrified appearance...GEORGE TESMAN comes from the right into the inner room ... He is a middle-sized, young-looking man ... He wears spectacles, and is somewhat carelessly dressed in comfortable indoor clothes.”

In this excerpt, Henrik Ibsen has described three characters: Miss Tesman, Berta, and George Tesman. He has clearly shown their personalities and mannerism through direct characterization.

Example #4: *Pride and Prejudice* (by Jane Austen)

“Mr. Bingley was good-looking and gentlemanlike; he had a

discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend.”

Mr. Bingley, the romantic interest of Jane, and his friend, Mr. Darcey, are described in this excerpt through direct characterization. She has admired Mr. Bingley for his pleasant countenance, comparing him to Mr. Darcy.

Example #5: *The Canterbury Tales* (by Geoffrey Chaucer)

“He yaf nat of that tene a pulled hen,
That seith that hunters ben nat hooly men,
Ne that a monk, whan he is reccheles...
His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,
And eek his face, as he hadde been enoynt.
His eyen stepe, and rollynge in his heed,
That stemed as a forneys of a leed;
His bootes souple, his hors in greet estaat.”

Through monk’s portrait, his physical and social life, readers see a [satire](#) of the religious figures that should live a proper monastic life of hard work and deprivation. This is the achievement of the description of Chaucer that he has described a character through direct characterization.

Function of Direct Characterization

Direct characterization shows traits as well as [motivation](#) of a character. Motivation can refer to desires, love, hate, or fear of the character. It is a crucial part that makes a story compelling. Descriptions about a character’s behavior, appearance, way of speaking, interests, mannerisms, and other aspects draw the interest of the readers and make the characters seem real. Also, good descriptions develop readers’ strong sense of interest in the story.