Defining Characterization

Characterization is the process by which the writer reveals the personality of a character. Characterization is revealed through **direct characterization** and **indirect characterization**.

Direct Characterization *tells* the audience what the personality of the character is.

Example: "The patient boy and quiet girl were both well mannered and did not disobey their mother."

Explanation: The author is directly telling the audience the personality of these two children. The boy is "patient" and the girl is "quiet."

Indirect Characterization *shows* things that reveal the personality of a character. There are five different methods of indirect characterization:

Speech	What does the character say? How does the character speak?
Thoughts	What is revealed through the character's private thoughts and feelings?
Effect on others toward the character.	What is revealed through the character's effect on other people? How do other characters feel or behave in reaction to the character?
Actions	What does the character do? How does the character behave?
Looks	What does the character look like? How does the character dress?

TIP #1:   Use the mnemonic device of STEAL to remember the five types of indirect characterization
TIP #2:   Use indirect characterization to analyze visual media:

Film: Look at how the character dresses and moves. Note the facial expressions when the director moves in for a close-up shot.

Drama: Pay attention to the way that the characters reveal their thoughts during a soliloquy.

Examples of Indirect Characterization from *The Cat in the Hat*

Type of Indirect Characterization	Examples	Explanation
Speech	Many of the words spoken by the cat at the beginning of the story have an upbeat connotative meaning. For instance, the cat says to the children, "But we can have / Lots of fun that is funny!" (7).	This reveals that the cat's character is an upbeat character that likes to have fun.
Thoughts	So all we could do was to Sit! Sit! Sit! Sit! And we did not like it. Not one little bit (3).	These are the thoughts of the narrator as he stares out the window on a rainy day. These thoughts reveal that this character is not happy about his current situation.
Effect on others	Throughout the first three quarters of the story, three different illustrations portray the fish scowling at the cat (11, 25, and 37) immediately after each of the cat's activities. When the cat returns to clean up his mess at the end of the story the fish is shown with a smile on his face (57).	The scowls on the fish's face support the argument that the cat's behavior at the beginning of the story is not acceptable to the fish. The fish's smile at the end of the story reveals that the cat is engaging in behavior that is now acceptable to the fish.
Actions	On page 18, the cat engages in "Up-Up-Up with a fish" an activity that involves the cat standing on a ball while balancing seven objects. Later in the story, the cat releases two "things" that fly kites inside the house.	These activities are outrageous, dangerous and should not be conducted in the house. They reveal that the cat's character is not concerned about rules related to safety and appropriateness.
Looks	Throughout the first three-quarters of the story, the cat is shown with a smile on his face. Towards the end of the story, however, when the cat is told to leave, he is shown leaving the house with slumped shoulders and a sad face.	The smiles reveal that the cat is enjoying himself and is not apologetic for his outrageous behavior. The frown and slumped shoulders at the end of the story show that he is not enjoying himself anymore.

Examples of Indirect Characterization from *The Cat in the Hat*

Character: The Cat

Type of Indirect Characterization	Examples	Explanation
Speech		
Thoughts		
Effect on others		
Actions		
Looks		

Examples of Indirect Characterization from *The Cat in the Hat*

Character: The Narrator and Sally

Type of Indirect Characterization	Examples	Explanation
Speech		
Thoughts		
Effect on others		
Actions		
Looks		

Examples of Indirect Characterization from *The Cat in the Hat*

Character: The Fish

Type of Indirect Characterization	Examples	Explanation
Speech		
Thoughts		
Effect on others		
Actions		
Looks		