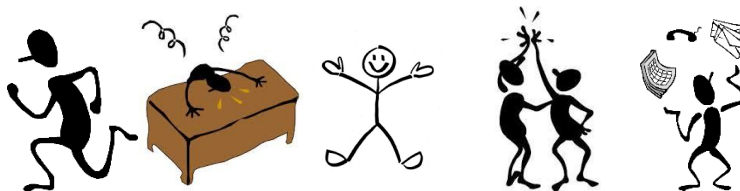


English Language Arts Activity Sheets

Identifying Character Traits in a Story



What is a Character Trait?

A character trait is an adjective that describes a specific quality, attitude and/or behaviour of a character. Like persons in real life, characters in stories can be described as “kind”, “adventurous” or “dishonest”.

How do we identify Character Traits in a Story?

Sometimes, writers will directly tell the reader about the character. Most times, however, writers give hints in their stories that the reader must use to infer or draw conclusions about their characters’ traits. These hints include what characters think, feel, do or say. For example, in the story, “Little Red Riding Hood”, the wolf may have been described as “devious”, because of the way he tried to trick Little Red Riding Hood in the story. You may also infer a character trait based on what other characters in the story say about him or her.

Examine the opening line from, *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes. What character traits can you identify?

"The Iron Man came to the top of the cliff. How far had he walked? Nobody knows. Where had he come from? Nobody knows. Taller than a house, the Iron Man stood at the top of the cliff, on the very brink, in the darkness."

The word, “daring” may come to mind because of the way the Iron Man stood at the top of a cliff, on the very brink. “Mysterious” may be another word, since nobody knows where he came from or how far he had walked. The fact that he stayed in the darkness also gives him a mysterious air. Let’s try to infer character traits in the following activity.

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The following excerpt was adapted from the story, “Man- Man” from V.S. Naipaul’s popular collection of short stories, *Miguel Street*. Read it carefully.

Everybody in Miguel Street said that Man-man was mad, and so they left him alone. But I am not so sure now that he was mad, and I can think of many people much madder than Man-man ever was.

He didn’t look mad. He was a man of medium height, thin; and he wasn’t bad-looking, either. He never stared at you the way I expected a mad man to do; and when you spoke to him you were sure of getting a very reasonable reply.

But he did have some curious habits.

He went up for every election, city council or legislative council, and then he stuck posters everywhere in the district. These posters were well printed. They just had the word ‘Vote’ and below that, Man-man’s picture.

At every election he got exactly three votes. That I couldn’t understand. Man-man voted for himself, but who were the other two?

Man-man never worked. But he was never idle. Man-man never worked. But he was never idle. He was hypnotised by the word, particularly the written word, and he would spend a whole day writing a single word.

One day I met Man-man at the corner of Miguel Street.

‘Boy, where you going?’ Man-man asked.

‘I going to school,’ I said.

And Man-man, looking at me solemnly, said in a mocking way, ‘So you goes to school, eh?’

I said automatically, ‘Yes, I goes to school.’ And I found that without intending it I had imitated Man-man’s correct and very English accent.

Man-man said, as though speaking to himself, ‘So the little man is going to school.’ Then he forgot me and took out a long stick of chalk from his pocket and began writing on the pavement. He drew a very big s in outline and then filled it in, and then the c and the H and the O. But then he started making several O’s, each smaller than the last, until he was writing in cursive, O after flowing O.

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Identifying Character Traits in a Story

Answer the following questions.



According to this passage, how did the residents in Miguel Street characterise Man-man? What did Man-man think, feel, do or say that caused you to make that inference?

The residents of Miguel Street characterised Man-man as _____.

Evidence for my answer : _____

The narrator, however, was not convinced of Man-man's alleged madness. In fact, he seems to have ambivalent feelings about the character. This simply means that he was undecided about whether Man Man was really a "mad man".



Can you identify two reasons for the narrator's ambivalence?

Reason 1: _____

Reason 2: _____

It is important to note that writers can develop characters in a story through the things they think, feel say or do. Characters can also be developed by what other characters say about them.



Based on what the narrator says about Man-man, how would you describe his (the narrator's) character? Give a reason for your answer.

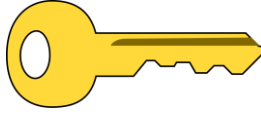
I would describe the narrator as _____

Reason for my answer _____

English Language Arts Activity Sheets

Identifying Character Traits in a Story

Answer key (Man Man)



According to the passage, everyone in the village dismissed Man-man as “mad”. Two main reasons for this are:

1. He always went up for every election in the village, even though only three people ever voted for him.
2. He would spend an entire day writing a single word.

The narrator was not convinced that Man-man was mad because:

1. Although Man-man did some curious things, the narrator could think of other people who acted “madder” than he was.
2. He did not appear to be mad (he was attractive and did not stare at people the way the narrator assumed a mad man would).
3. He was able to converse in a reasonable way.
4. Although he never worked, he was never idle

The narrator may be described as:

- Naïve/too trusting because despite what seems like obvious evidence that proves that Man-man was not in his right mind, he still did not want to believe it.
- Non-judgmental because he felt like he needed more obvious proof of Man Man’s madness/ He was not willing to judge Man-man only on the few curious things he did. He took everything about Man-man into consideration.