

Character Chart

Activity One: One way authors use characterization is to develop the theme of their text. As you reread “Everyday Use”, we will examine the characterization of Mama and Maggie, and ask, “How does this characterization advance the theme of Walker’s short story?”

Theme: As you discover characterization, you will want to ask yourself, “How does this relate to the theme of the text?” To help you focus on theme, write down your theme statement from the previous lesson.

Theme Statement: *In the short story, “Everyday Use” Alice Walker illustrates the idea that legacy is a connection with family, their struggles and their stories.*

Mama Characterization:

Trait	Mama	Evidence from Text	Commentary
<i>Questions to consider about the trait</i>	<i>Description of Mama’s traits.</i>	<i>Note words, phrases in the text that relate to the trait.</i>	<i>Explain how the trait relates to the theme.</i>
Speech: What does the character say? How does the character speak?	<i>Mama speaks in the slang of the country. She is direct and doesn’t say much.</i>	<i>You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie</i> <i>I reckon she would</i>	<i>Mama’s speech relates the story of her upbringing in the south during segregation.</i> <i>It also shows her struggles because she is uneducated.</i>
Thoughts: What is revealed through the character’s private thoughts and feelings?	<i>Mama shows how she wants to be educated and beautiful, someone her daughter could be proud to call mom.</i>	<i>I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake.</i> <i>Why don't you do a dance around the ashes? I'd</i>	<i>Mama’s conflict with Dee reveals how Mama feels about the world around her. She wants both to be approved by a changing, modern society and to hold fast to her own way of life. Later,</i>

	<i>She also reveals how she doesn't like the way Dee is ashamed of her family.</i>	<i>wanted to ask her. She had hated the house that much.</i>	<i>Mama will have to make a choice between these two conflicting ideals; she chooses to hold fast to her own story.</i>
Trait	Mama	Evidence from Text	Commentary
Evolution: How does the character change from the beginning of the story to the end? What other characters, conflicts, or actions cause that change?	<i>Mama starts out seeking Dee's approval, wanting Dee to be a part of her family. When she sees, through her conflict with Dee, that she must choose between her loyalty to Dee and her loyalty to her heritage, she wisely chooses her heritage.</i>	<i>When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I did some.thing I never done before:</i>	<i>Mama's decision to take Maggie's side over Dee's mirrors her strong belief in the value of her family. This change touches Mama to her core as she realizes that family is more important to her than what society thinks about her.</i>
Actions/Motivations: What does the character do? Why does the character behave this way?	<i>Mama takes the quilts that Dee wants and gives them to Maggie. She has never taken Maggie's side before, always putting Dee's needs and wants first.</i>	<i>...hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open.</i>	<i>Mama's actions show that she is loyal to her family and the legacy, no matter how blighted, that they have left for Maggie and Dee.</i>

Looks: Describe the character's physical appearance. How do they look? How do they dress?	<i>Mama describes herself as rough.</i>	<i>I am a large, big.boned woman with rough, man.working hands.</i>	<i>Mama's appearance shows a woman who has worked hard and struggled a lot. She is like many of the African American women, who struggled with the question of their legacy.</i>

Maggie Characterization:

Trait	Maggie	Evidence from Text	Commentary
<i>Questions to consider about the trait</i>	<i>Description of Maggie's traits.</i>	<i>Note words, phrases in the text that relate to the trait.</i>	<i>Explain how the trait relates to the theme.</i>
Speech: What does the character say? How does the character speak?	<i>Maggie has fewer than five lines in the whole story.</i>	<i>"I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts."</i>	<i>Maggie represents the people who have been scarred by their struggles. They hardly speak up for themselves.</i>

Thoughts: What is revealed through the character's private thoughts and feelings?	<i>At the end of the story, Maggie shows that she is no longer afraid of Dee.</i>	<i>Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared.</i>	<i>Maggie's smile shows the reader that the author believes that giving the quilts to Maggie, staying true to their stories and family, is the right choice.</i>
Effect on others: What is revealed through the character's effect on other people? How do other characters feel or behave in reaction to the character?	<i>Maggie propels Mama's change of heart. When she is willing to give up the quilts, Mama realizes that she should have been taking up for Maggie.</i>	<i>She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at her. This was Maggie's portion. This was the way she knew God to work.</i> <i>When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet.</i>	<i>Maggie's utter defeat and willingness to give in, causes Mama to change her mind, a decision that reveals the theme of the text.</i>
Trait	Maggie	Evidence from Text	Commentary
Actions/Motivations: What does the character do? Why does the character behave this way?	<i>Maggie just looks down. Until the end when she is able to look at Dee. Maggie is resigned to be less than her sister.</i>	<i>She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at her.</i>	<i>Maggie's willingness to accept the abuse her sister dishes out reveals one of the way African Americans struggled in the aftermath of slavery.</i>
Looks: Describe the character's physical	<i>Maggie is homely with scars down her arms from the fire that burned</i>	<i>She has been like this, chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire that</i>	<i>Maggie's posture and demeanor reveal a person who has been through</i>

appearance. How do they look? How do they dress?	down her house.	burned the other house to the ground.	struggles.
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Dee Characterization:

Trait	Dee	Evidence from Text	Commentary
<i>Questions to consider about the trait</i>	<i>Description of Dee's traits.</i>	<i>Note words, phrases in the text that relate to the trait.</i>	<i>Explain how the trait relates to the theme.</i>
Speech: What does the character say? How does the character speak?	<i>Dee spends a lot of time exclaiming over the items in the house, as if she is shopping.</i>	<i>I never knew how lovely these benches are. Un huh," she said happily. "And I want the dasher, too."</i>	<i>Dee's shopping trip reveals the shallow meaning she attaches to legacy. She wants things to prove that she has a heritage, but she doesn't take time to build a relationship with her family.</i>
Thoughts: What is revealed through the character's private thoughts and feelings?	<i>Dee doesn't have any private thoughts and feelings in the story.</i>		<i>Dee's lack of private thoughts reveal the shallowness of her point of view on legacy.</i>

Evolution: How does the character change from the beginning of the story to the end? What other characters, conflicts, or actions cause that change?	<i>Dee doesn't change.</i>	<i>"Your heritage," she said, And then she turned to Maggie, kissed her, and said, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it."</i>	<i>Her clipped remark at the end of the story show that Dee never really cared about her family.</i>
Actions/Motivations: What does the character do? Why does the character behave this way?	<i>Dee changes her name.</i>	<i>"What happened to 'Dee'?" I wanted to know.</i> <i>"She's dead," Wangero said. "I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me."</i>	<i>Dee is more concerned with the oppression of her people than getting to know her people.</i>
Looks: Describe the character's physical appearance. How do they look? How do they dress?	<i>Dee wears colorful clothing, bangles, and sunglasses.</i> <i>Earlier, she is described as wanting only the best clothes to go to school. Other people in the family made sacrifices, so she could have nice clothes.</i>	<i>Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy dress to wear to her graduation from high school; black pumps to match a green suit she'd made from an old suit somebody gave me.</i> <i>A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun</i>	<i>Dee's manner of dress reveals that she is flashy on the outside and concerned with material wealth instead of family relationships.</i>

Activity Two: At the end of the story, Mama and Maggie have both changed as a result of Dee’s visit, but Dee remains unchanged. How does Alice Walker’s choice not to have Dee change help Walker reveal the theme to her audience? *Dee’s continual lack of awareness about the value of her family, help Walker show the reader just how important family is in legacy. Dee rejects her family in her childhood looking at the flames of her burning house with a gleam and her eye, and then she continues to reject them under the guise of rejecting those “who oppress” her. This unchanged attitude of Dee’s helps Walker reveal the true nature of those who would erase their ancestor’s struggles: selfish.*