ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**characterization**: the way a writer creates and develops a character’s traits

**characters**: the people, animals, or imaginary creatures in a work of literature

**character traits**: the qualities shown by a character

**inferences**: reasonable judgments, based on prior knowledge and the text

HERE’S HOW

Step 1: Identify methods of characterization. Writers use four main methods of characterization to develop characters:

- **Direct comments** about a character’s traits.
  
  **Example**: Candida was not candid. She was, as we say, a teller of lies.

- **Physical descriptions** of the character.
  
  **Example**: Finely-tailored clothes hung perfectly on George’s body.

- **Thoughts, speech, and actions** of a character
  
  **Example**: Amy glanced at Nick’s test sheet. She wondered, should she copy? Then she thought about the grade. Quickly she circled “b.”

- **What other characters think, say, or do** toward one another.
  
  **Example**: Nick rolled his eyes. “Why can’t that girl just study?” he thought.

Step 2: Make inferences about characters. Writers may describe characters indirectly, providing clues. Look for clues that allow you to make an inference or an educated guess about the character.

**EXAMPLE**

Try finding the clues that lead you to get to know Lenore in the following passage:

**Miss Walker** (*quietly*). Lenore, that was beautiful.

(*Lenore gives a shy, tentative smile*)

**Girl # 1**. It was just like a book.

(*There is a silent moment after this pronouncement. Lenore looks at the other students trying to suppress her excitement.*)

**Miss Walker**. I’m really very impressed, Lenore. Leave your story on my desk. There are some people I’d like to show it to.

—Keith Leckie, *Words on a Page*