CHARACTER ANALYSIS

To analyze a character, you must find out what makes him/her “tick.” Look at the character as you would anyone you meet for the first time. You may notice or learn the following:

- physical traits - what the character looks like, how he/she dresses, how he moves
- psychological/personality traits
- motivation
- behavior/actions
- relationships - with other characters in the story, how others see/react to him/her
- weaknesses/faults
- strengths/virtues
- moral constitution - often a character will agonize over right and wrong
- protagonist/antagonist - does the story revolve around this character’s actions?
- complex/simple personality
- history and background
- change - has the character changed during the course of the story? What was his/her motivation? Why?
- similarities and differences of the characters
- Does the character have a function in the story?

NOTE: You also will need to examine how the author presents the character. The following passage will help you understand this. It is from A Handbook to Literature, Sixth edition, by C. Hugh Holman & William Harmon, Macmillan Publishing, New York, 1992.

Characterization is “the creation of imaginary persons so they seem lifelike. There are three fundamental methods of characterization: (1) the explicit presentation by the author of the character through direct exposition, either in an introductory block or more often piecemeal throughout the work, illustrated by action; (2) the presentation of the character in action, with little or no explicit comment by the author, in the expectation that the reader can deduce the attributes of the actor from the actions; and (3) the representation from within the character, without comment by the author, of the impact of actions and emotion on the character’s inner self. . . .The author may concentrate on a dominant trait to the exclusion of other aspects of personality, or the author may attempt to present a fully rounded creation. If the presentation of a single dominant trait is carried to an extreme, not a believable character but a caricature will result. If this method is handled with skill, it can produce striking and interesting two-dimensional characters that lack depth. . . .Sometimes these characters are given descriptive names. . . .On the other hand, the author may present so convincing a [collection] of personality traits that a complex . . . character emerges; such a character is three-dimensional. . . .A character may be static or dynamic. A static character is one who changes little if at all. . . . Sometimes a static character is revealed bit by bit [but] does not change, although our view of him steadily changes. . . . A dynamic character . . . is one who is modified by actions and experiences, and one objective of the work . . . is to reveal the consequences of these actions” (80-81).

Character is also defined as “a complicated term that includes the idea of the moral constitution of the human personality. . . .the presence of moral uprightness, and the simpler notion of the presence of creatures in art that seem to be human beings of one sort or another. . . . [Sometimes] the person is described not as an individualized personality but as an example of some vice or virtue. . . .” (79).