

Identifying Character Traits

Characters do things. They feel things. They hear things. They say things. They think things. They go places. They can walk, run, leap, and jump. They may sit and rock in a rocking chair. They may just lie in bed, sleep, and dream. But the important thing is that characters act.



And these actions show us what kind of people these characters are: friendly, sad, nosy, happy, love, truck, confused, angry, or inventive. When we talk about a character, we often describe that character in terms of character traits, descriptive adjectives like happy, describe ourselves or others, but we're using them to describe fictional characters in something we've read. The author may tell us these traits directly, but more often the author will show us these traits in action. Our job as readers is to draw a conclusion about the character's traits (to infer them) from what the character says, thinks, and does. We might infer a character trait from something a character does only once, or we might draw a conclusion from a series of things the character says and does. It's easy to get confused about what characters do, so as a simple rule, like the one below, you fill in the matching information for the related column. For this example, we'll use the character of Harry Potter from Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.