

Character sketch of  
miss strangeworth:  
the possibility of evil  
by shirley jackson...



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

A discussion of the character traits of a fictitious elderly woman named Miss Strangeworth will occur in this character sketch. Miss Strangeworth was an elderly woman, who was representative of her town's history. She led a quiet public life, and was on friendly terms with most residents of her town. Unknown to these residents, Miss Strangeworth lived a double life. She was a friendly, grandmotherly figure in public; however, when she was out of the public's eye, she became the author of unsettling letters based on assumptions. Proof will be provided from *The Possibility of Evil* that Miss Strangeworth possessed the character traits of self-consciousness, discreetness, and self-righteousness.

Miss Strangeworth was self-conscious, which is a character trait that a great deal of people can identify with. An example of Miss Strangeworth's self-consciousness can be found in the last paragraph on page 225 that concludes on page 226. Miss Strangeworth had been writing a letter to the Cranes about their baby child. Upon the completion of the letter, the following narration illustrated Miss Strangeworth's actions with faulty letters, "She was pleased with the letter about the Crane baby. She was fond of doing things exactly right. When she made a mistake, as she sometimes did, she took the page to the kitchen stove and burned it at once" (225-226). One might think that this clearly proves Miss Strangeworth's self-consciousness, because she burned any faulty letters. This can be interpreted as an action to mask failure, as nobody could possibly obtain the faulty letter without Miss Strangeworth delivering it to them. Miss Strangeworth was masking her failures from herself, which may better be summed up as self-denial. Miss Strangeworth's self-consciousness allows for

one to identify with her, because many people have exhibited actions of self-consciousness or self-denial when they made a mistake.

In addition to allowing for identification with Miss Strangeworth through her self-consciousness, one might view Miss Strangeworth as being discreet.

Evidence of Miss Strangeworth's discreetness can be found in the second paragraph on page 227. Miss Strangeworth had completed the writing of her letters and was on her walk to deliver them. The following quotation states Miss Strangeworth's discreetness, "She had always made a point of mailing her letters very secretly. Consequently, she timed her walk so she could reach the post office just as darkness was starting to dim the outlines of the trees and the shapes of people"

This clearly illustrates Miss Strangeworth's discreetness, because as one might observe, she tried to avoid recognition by arriving at the post office when darkness fell. Also, the word "secretly" is used, which would suggest that discreet is also applicable for describing her actions. Miss Strangeworth's discreetness may allow for somebody to comprehend how important keeping her letter-writing identity a secret, was to Miss Strangeworth.

Finally, Miss Strangeworth's discreetness allowing for one to comprehend how important keeping her letter-writing identity a secret was to Miss Strangeworth, Miss Strangeworth's self-righteousness grabbed the reader's interest. Evidence of Miss Strangeworth's self-righteousness can be found in the second paragraph on page 226. Miss Strangeworth had completed a letter addressed to Mrs. Harper. Upon the completion of this letter, Miss Strangeworth's self-identified worth to her town was described in the

following quote, "There were so many wicked people in the world and only one Miss Strangeworth left in the town"(226). This exposed Miss Strangeworth's self-righteousness, because it tried to justify her overly harsh letters with what she saw as a positive outcome. She thought she was helping her town immensely by spreading what amounted to unfounded rumors. This self-righteousness made the reader profoundly dissatisfied with the main character, and planted a wish for ill-will against Miss Strangeworth in the reader's heart.

It was proven almost certainly, that Miss Strangeworth possessed the character traits of self-consciousness, discretion, and self-righteousness in *The Possibility of Evil*. Miss Strangeworth may be fictitious, but people like her are always existent in society. As society ages, we can only hope its values and principles evolve to lessen the number of Miss Strangeworth's to be found in the world.

#### Works Cited

Jackson, Shirley. *The Possibility of Evil*.