

# Emphasizing conflicts using characterization methods essay example

[Technology](#), [Internet](#)



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It goes without saying that the importance of characters in a story is very important, given that it is through the use of characters that authors are able convey the intended themes of a story. However, it must also be noted that the dilemma in assessing the quality of characters is dependent on the techniques used to present a character, whereby his or her innate personality is exhibited or expressed, either directly or indirectly. Such is the case in the short stories, Thank You, Ma’am, by Hughes Langston, and Letter from Gaza, by Kanafani Ghassan, wherein characterization is effectively achieved despite of the two stories being very diverse in nature; one delves on maturity and lessons learned, while the other on patriotism and war. In this regard, the conflicts in the two stories are described by the authors’ use of five methods of characterization, namely physical description, action or attitude, inner thoughts, reaction and speech, and that the conflicts imbedded in the said stories are enhanced by the use of these five methods.

## **Hughes’ “ Thank You, Ma’am”**

It is easily observable that Hughes employs several methods of characterization to clarify to the readers the type of person the characters portray in the story. First among these is the use of ‘ physical description’ at the very opening of the story, which visualizes Mrs. Luella Jones as being “ a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails” (Hughes 1). As such, this description introduces Mrs. Jones to the readers, specifically as a woman large and domineering enough to manhandle a young male in the person of Roger. This feature of dominance is supported by using ‘ action-attitude’ as a method of further explaining Mrs. Jones’ character. This is seen in the lines “ the large woman simply turned around and kicked him square in hid blue-jeaned sitterand shook him until his teeth rattled” (Hughes 1). Judging from these methods of characterization used, it can be argued that the story is more focused on using physical action as a means of emphasizing its themes. A good basis for this is to accentuate Mrs. Jones as a very strong woman, not only due to her enormous size, but more so in being able to reform a juvenile delinquent in just a short span of time.

In using the physical and the action-attitude method of characterization, Hughes’ story is able to effectively portray the characters of Mrs. Jones and Roger effectively. This is true since each of them exhibits their own intrinsic qualities as a human being despite of being fictional in nature. Hence, the readers are able to view Mrs. Jones as a heavy-set African-American woman, perhaps of middle age, and with iron-strong will. On the other hand, Roger is revealed as a weakling both in terms of physique and willpower, yet is

innately a good person despite of his initial attempt to steal the bag of Mrs. Jones.

## **Kanafani's "Letter from Gaza"**

Kanafani's short story differs from Hughes in the former's being both a psychological reflection of events and in revealing a patriotic point of view, as opposed to the more physical approach endeavored by Hughes. In Kanafani's story, the method of 'inner thoughts' is especially dominant in explaining its conflicts considering its definition that, "What the character thinks reveals things about the character" (Methods of Characterization 7). This is especially observable in the lines "No, my friend This obscure feeling that you had as you lefty Gaza, this small feeling must grow into a giant deep within you here among the ugly debris of defeat" (Kanafani 1). As such, this point of view by the narrator in Kanafani's short story expresses clearly the narrator's sentiments of foregoing with their plans of pursuing the American Dream, and instead staying in their native land to defend it against foreign aggressors.

Further, it is necessary to use the 'inner thoughts' method in the aim of amplifying the level of conflict in the story, both in personal and social levels. This is especially true when considering that through the 'inner thoughts', "We discover things about their personalities and feelings, which sometimes helps us understand the character's actions" (Warner 1). Hence, through the said method the reader is able to comprehend how much the narrator loves his native land, so much so that he is willing to forget his long-standing dream just to make a stand in his own country, regardless of the futility of

such action.

Another method used by Kanafani in the short story is ‘ speech’, which is important since it gives the readers an opportunity to know a character deeply. An example of this can be seen in the lines, “ My friend Never shall I forget Nadia's leg, amputated from the top of the thigh. No! Nor shall I forget the grief which had moulded her face and merged into its traits for ever” (Kanafani 1). As such, these lines spoken by the narrator clearly picture him as being sensitive, given that he is very much affected by the debilitating injury suffered by his niece and that is was enough for the narrator to decide on abandoning his dream of working in America. Consequently, the method of ‘ speech’ is comparable with ‘ reactions’, given that it allows the readers to know the real personality of the character. In this respect, the narrator is portrayed as a loving and caring individual when Nadia reacted upon seeing him in the lines, “ but then she stopped, gritted her teeth and I heard her voice again, coming from faraway. ‘ Uncle!’” (Kanafani 1). What is also worth noting in this line is how Nadia, by pleading the name of her uncle, knows that he will find ways to avenge her injuries, and perhaps even take a life-long crusade because of the attacks that caused her injury, which proved to be correct.

## **Conclusion**

The importance of proper use of techniques of characterization to accentuate conflicts is exemplified in the short stories by Kanafani and Hughes, whereby the conflicts are enhanced by the use of physical description, action or attitude, inner thoughts, reaction and speech. As such, through the

abovementioned techniques, the readers are able to clearly perceive Mrs. Jones as a strong-willed woman, Roger as an unconfident teenager, and the narrator in Kanafani's short story as a nationalist and resolute person who would readily compromise his material goals and safety for the betterment of his native land. Moreover, through these characterization methods, these characters cease to be simply fictional in nature and instead take the form of real individuals with real aspirations. Thus, characterization methods then are integral in maximizing the effectiveness of conveying types of characters, especially in terms of describing conflicts and their respective reactions to such catalysts.

## **Works cited**

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