

# Character and reader



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Sample Essay One In the story " Yellow Fish, " the main character is never directly described or mentioned. The reader must inference everything except their name, Anu. The author creates the character through reflections and other various techniques. Throughout the story, the writer uses very choppy sentences, as well as fragments, to represent Anu's stream of consciousness. By doing this, the writer gives her a timid, scarred personality. By limiting the sentence structure, Ambai indirectly leads the reader to believe that Anu is depressed, and has faced tragedy in her life. The author does this to foreshadow the reflection on Anu's loss of her child. The reflection itself also serves purpose to the author. Anu says, " The mouth of the urn. Open it" (54). This statement is indicative of some level of shock Anu is experiencing. By giving Anu these lines, Ambai reveals to the reader that Anu is absolutely traumatized by this occurrence, and felt as if the ashes in the urn were somehow still connected to the lost child. The author reveals this instance to portray to the reader why Anu is the way that she has portrayed her to this point in the story. Finally, Ambai uses the yellow fish to show Anu's sense of closure. By giving the fish similar characteristics to Anu's lost daughter, the author creates an idea of salvation. By saving the fish, and sending it out into the sea, Ambai conveys to the audience that Anu feels her daughter is in a better place now. The fish takes " an arrogant leap" (79), which finalizes the idea that Anu feels that way. The author provides this closure to provide similar closure to the story. With Anu's revitalization, the story comes to an end. Ambai creates the character Anu through a series of choppy sentences, a reflection as well as a metaphor. She takes her readers on a journey through tragedy, depression, and ultimately closure. These traits make Anu relatable and make the reader incredibly sympathetic

to her. Sample Essay Two Tamil writer Ambai's "Yellow Fish" is ostensibly a short story about a woman on a summer outing at the beach. Seeing a discarded fish unsuitable for commercial use, the narrator, in an act of empathy and concern, convinces one of the local fishermen to return the dying animal back to its ocean home. In characterizing this empathy of the narrator, however, Ambai makes a larger claim for an interconnection between all living things. Paradoxically, the narrator's empathy is established initially through setting rather than indirect characterization. The reader perceives events through the eyes of the narrator before the reader ever realizes the story is a first person narration; indeed, the first use of the "I" pronoun does not occur until the approximate midpoint of the narrative (32). Description is revealed in short declarative sentences that place the reader into the sense world of the protagonist. Notice, for example, how "the eye is compelled by the sea alone" (4), or "the saris press upon the eyes gently" (25-26), as the reader, in at least some sense, becomes the narrator, or at least her eyes and ears as she traverses the beach. Even more explicit is the introduction of the second person "you," used to describe what the reader sees ("fish filling the nets" [15-16]). Thus, the reader is attuned to seeing the world through the gaze of another, perceives it as the narrator, allowing insight into the world she inhabits. This is important because this is precisely what the narrator does when she imagines the pain of the fish. She does this in a manner similar to the opening paragraphs, paragraphs in which the reader has been forced into the world of another. In the narrator's case, however, she connects the death throes of the fish with the death of her own child. The fish is described as a mouth that "gasps and closes ... [shuddering] and [tossing] on the hot sand" (34-35), just as her own

premature child would “ open and close her mouth, as if suckling” (44-45) in the incubator, fighting for breath. Likewise, the fish has arisen from the sea, as the infant Jalaja means “ she who rises from the waters” (42), making the identification explicit. The final connection, though, is to the “ mouth” (52) of the child’s funeral urn that “ contains only ashes” (55), for if the fish is not returned to the water, it, like Jalajal, will die. What happens, in short, is a metaphorical substitution that allows for the connection between person and fish, that, on some level, the infant and the fish become one, as the narrator, in a moment of clarity, remembers the grief at her own loss and transfers it to the hypothetical death of the fish. This samsaric connection of life, then, is created through the awakening perception of this fact through the characterization of the protagonist. The reader experiences this lifeworld initially through the description of the setting, becoming, in essence, the narrator’s surrogate. This in turn creates the precondition whereby the reader understands the protagonist’s own point-of-view transference when conflating fish with child. The woman’s empathy, like the reader’s, arises from seeing the world through the filter of another perception, clarified in the end when Ambai writes, “ You can see its clear yellow for a very long time” (80-81). Reader, protagonist, fish, child: all are part of the same interconnected web of being, as the narrator’s empathy becomes the reader’s own, allowing for the spiritual epiphany that all are one.

Sample Essay Three In the story “ Yellow Fish” by Ambai, the author characterizes the protagonist through nostalgic imagery, comparisons, and a sense of helplessness. By combining a mix of scenic metaphors with real-to-life character events, Ambai tells a sad story that can only be fully understood by reading deeper into what each detail means in the protagonist’s (Anu’s)

character. Ambai writes with a great deal of nostalgic imagery. She paints the picture of her protagonist as someone who has lost a baby shortly after its birth through a series of flashbacks. When discussing the sand on beach, Ambai stresses its hotness and how much of it there is, which can be made to resemble how the ashes of the child tossed into the sea were not important to the rest of the world, only to the protagonist. This creates a feeling that the main character is very isolated. This isolation is also seen in the description of the fisher men and women. The women are all dressed so brightly in contrast to the “ ash grey sea” (13), showing how the protagonist’s world at the sea is separated from the rest of that society. The word “ ash” in the “ ash grey sea” is also an interesting choice when it comes into play later that the baby’s ashes now rested in the ocean. In that same vein, Ambai also uses a great deal of comparisons. The fact that the fish is yellow is no coincidence, as the people in that region of the world are also said to be yellow- skinned. The fish obviously represents the baby in this story, too, as seen in how both gasped for life giving oxygen. All of the feelings the audience infers that Anu has for the fish are felt for the child as well. The author also writes how the fish is helpless (76), much like Anu’s baby. By giving all of these feelings to Anu, the audience gets the sense that Anu is filled with grief and pain. Finally, Ambai gives Anu the trait of not fully being self-sustaining or capable. Anu is never able to provide for either the fish or Jalaja to keep them alive. When Jalaja is dying, Anu had to wait outside of her room, not able to do anything. When the yellow fish is dying, Anu is not even able to pick it up and throw it into the sea. This might connect back to the throwing of the ashes into the sea, as Anu might have too much sorrow. Not that she does not want to help; she tries a variety of

tactics to help the yellow fish, but is ultimately handicapped in this regard. Ambai writes this to show how Anu is a caring person who has compassion on helpless creatures, but is helpless herself when it comes to fixing things. In the end, Anu is a mother who has suffered the loss of her child. By describing her actions with the fish, Ambai leads the audience to believe Anu is a woman who is trying to compensate for a failure that was not necessarily hers, and wants to make up for it in any way, even if the life she saves is only that of a fish.

Sample Essay Four The author characterizes the protagonist as someone who is sentimental, compassionate, and very sad about the loss of their child through the use of detailed descriptions and comparisons. At the beginning of the story, the narrator describes the bright colors as “blinding,” “demonic,” “profound”, and “assaulting.” By using these words with generally negative connotations, the reader would begin to see that the main character obviously has negative/sad sentiments related to the sea. By making the main character come off as having bad or sad experiences, the author is trying to get her audience to feel sympathy for the protagonist. The author continues to paint the main character as sentimental and sad when she parallels the yellow dying fish on the sand to that of when her newborn daughter died. She compared and likened the fish’s round eyes to that of her daughter’s and the fish gasping for air to how her daughter open and close her mouth as if sucking. The character even likens the color of the “ash grey sea” to that of her child’s ashes. This would cause the audience to see the main character’s sadness and sentimentality and cause them to sympathize with her. Lastly, the author reveals the main character’s compassionate side when they ask a fisherboy to throw the dying yellow fish back into the sea. By saving the sick old fish that was undesirable, the main

character would now seem like a kind person that did not want to see another being suffer as her daughter had. By characterizing the main character as compassionate, the author would further succeed in getting the audience to sympathize with her. It is easier to sympathize with someone who appears kind and undeserving of pain than to someone who comes off otherwise.