

Grades 9–10 Playlist: Analyze How Complex Characters Develop

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3:

- Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

Welcome

Complex characters, or characters that change over the course of a narrative, are important to the development of a story. They interact with other characters in ways that allow the reader to more fully understand those characters, and they are usually crucial to the plot development. Understanding complex characters, how they develop and work within the narrative, helps the reader better understand the story.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- identify complex characters.
- analyze how complex characters develop, interact with other characters, and advance the plot of the narrative.

Key Terms

- A **complex** or **dynamic character** is a character who has many different characteristics and develops throughout the story. He or she may mature or change his or her mind about a particular character or event. He or she may learn a lesson or undergo some transformative experience. Complex or dynamic characters are significantly different at the end of a story from what they were like at the beginning of a story.
- Unlike complex characters, **static characters** do not change over the course of a story. A static character does not learn a lesson, mature, or undergo any transformative experiences.

Exploring the Standard

Not all characters function the same way in a story. Some characters have minor roles and are **static**, which means that they do not change throughout the course of the narrative. Other characters are **complex** or **dynamic**, meaning that they do change throughout the course of the story. Often, main characters, or protagonists, are complex characters because they will have transformative experiences, learn lessons, and mature during the story. Understanding whether a character is static or complex helps the reader anticipate what will happen to that character throughout the story. This knowledge will also help the reader more easily understand the plot, since complex characters often impact plot development in significant ways.



Watch!

Watch this video about the difference between static and dynamic characters:

- <http://www.teachertube.com/video/dynamic-versus-static-character-309262>

A Closer Look: Understanding Complex Characters

To identify **complex characters**, a reader must pay attention to the way a character is described and how he or she interacts with other characters.

The passage below is an excerpt from *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. In it, two complex characters interact for the first time. While reading the passage, think about the characteristics of each. What can a reader learn about these characters through this interaction?

¹I put him back, conscious at his touch of a certain icy pang along my blood. “Come, sir,” said I. “You forget that I have not yet the pleasure of your acquaintance. Be seated, if you please.” And I showed him an example, and sat down myself in my customary seat and with as fair an imitation of my ordinary manner to a patient, as the lateness of the hour, the nature of my preoccupations, and the horror I had of my visitor, would suffer me to muster.

²“I beg your pardon, Dr. Lanyon,” he replied civilly enough. “What you say is very well founded; and my impatience has shown its heels to my politeness. I come here at the instance of your colleague, Dr. Henry Jekyll, on a piece of business of some moment; and I understood...” He paused and put his hand to his throat, and I could see, in spite of his collected manner, that he was wrestling against the approaches of the hysteria—“I understood, a drawer...”

³But here I took pity on my visitor’s suspense, and some perhaps on my own growing curiosity.

⁴“There it is, sir,” said I, pointing to the drawer, where it lay on the floor behind a table and still covered with the sheet.

⁵He sprang to it, and then paused, and laid his hand upon his heart: I could hear his teeth grate with the convulsive action of his jaws; and his face was so ghastly to see that I grew alarmed both for his life and reason.

⁶“Compose yourself,” said I.

⁷He turned a dreadful smile to me, and as if with the decision of despair, plucked away the sheet. At sight of the contents, he uttered one loud sob of such immense relief that I sat petrified. And the next moment, in a voice that was already fairly well under control, “Have you a graduated glass?” he asked.

Practice!

Using the information given in the passage above, create two lists. One list will contain information about the narrator and the other will contain information about his guest. Include any details about profession, mood, personality, and anything about the relationship between the two characters and how they feel about each other. After creating the two lists, use this information to summarize each character. Think about how a reader knows about the personality of each character. How does the author convey this information? Do any personality traits seem to be in conflict with each other or with the situation?



Teaching Notes: Analyze How Complex Characters Develop

The goal of RL.9-10.3 is for students to identify complex characters and analyze how they develop over the course of the text. Students will also think critically about how complex characters interact with other characters and advance the plot of the story. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

(Answer Key)

In this section of the playlist, students are asked to use clues from the text to identify characteristics of complex characters. They are presented with a passage in which two characters interact for the first time and are asked to make two lists of the information they can glean from the interaction between the characters. Here is an example of what those lists might look like:

Details about the narrator	Details about his visitor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't know the visitor Seems polite and formal Is a doctor Is horrified by the visitor Attempts to seem like he is not uneasy Knows Dr. Henry Jekyll Seems to have something the visitor wants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seems too eager and familiar Has the ability to make the narrator uncomfortable Knows Dr. Henry Jekyll Very nervous – possibly prone to hysteria Tries hard not to get overexcited Seems to be there to get something or see something (a drawer)

Activities

1. Direct students to form groups of three or four. Ask them to make predictions about what will happen next in the story based on the interaction between the narrator and the guest in the passage included in this playlist.
2. Lead a class discussion about the passage and make sure that students understand each of the characters, as well as the action of the passage. After students fully understand the passage, encourage them to choose an ending to the encounter based on the character information available to them in the passage. Allow students to share their versions of the story and discuss how this character interaction can impact the plot of the story.

Applying the Standard

In this section, students are asked to read the entirety of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and practice the skills they have acquired in this playlist. If this reading is too long, use the excerpt from “Dr. Lanyon’s Narrative,” starting at “I rose from my place with...” and ending at “The creature who crept into...”

