Character Overview

Definition:

- Character is any imagined person or being in a story whose behavior, appearance, and thoughts influence the action and advance the author’s purpose. Readers make personal connections to stories through characters’ experiences.

Character Terms and Traits:

**Stock**—known already for one outstanding trait such as bravery, cowardice, evil; uncomplicated characters

**Round**—not easily categorized; behavior, although generally consistent, might be surprising; often have contrasting traits that combine together to make them especially interesting

**Flat**—character with only one or two essential features, who rarely changes in the story; can still be unique (Tiny Tim)

**Archetype**—stock character that exists in art and literature of all cultures, thought to represent universal human fears and desires

**Anti-hero**—protagonist obviously lacking in one or more of the typical hero attributes (bravery, ambition, kindness)

**Motivation** – reason a character behaves the way he or she does

Examples:

Stock: the Joker, Cinderella
Unique/Round: Forrest Gump, Hamlet
Flat: parents in “Victory Lap,” boss in Office Space
Archetypes: Earth Mother, hero on a quest
Anti-hero: Holden Caulfield, Napoleon Dynamite

Note: A character can have elements of several of these types. A woman can be an archetypal Earth mother, but have specific traits that make her a round character.

Questions to Ponder:

What is the purpose of the anti-hero in fiction? Why does s/he appeal?
What influences whether or not people change? What examples do we see from the stories we’ve read?
How do unseen characters influence the main characters in the stories we’ve read?