

# CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

Many character descriptions are lazy. They list details of hair colour, eye colour, height, build, recycling the same typical ideas. This can help build a surface image of the character, but it doesn't really spark much interest or leave you wanting to know more. It also doesn't tell you much about the character as a person.

When describing a character, look past the surface. Think of other categories as well as physical appearance. How do they move? What expression is always on their face? How do other characters view them? What aura or impression do they give – do they seem dangerous, captivating, secretive, alluring, innocent? What type of person are they; how do they think, what do they feel? How do they react to certain situations compared to others? What quirks or habits do they have? What is their mental state?

You want your reader to be curious about this character, wanting to read on to find out more about them and what they will do next.

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish. He gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation. He had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself to the lawyer with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whispering, and somewhat broken voice: all these were points against him, but all of them together could not describe the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing, and fear with which Mr. Utterson regarded him.

– Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr Hyde*

She has bright, dark eyes and satiny brown skin and stands tilted up on her toes with arms slightly extended to her sides, as if ready to take wing at the slightest sound.

– Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*

A black shadow dropped down into the circle. It was Bagheera the Black Panther, inky black all over, but with the panther markings showing up in certain lights like the pattern of watered silk. Everybody knew Bagheera, and nobody cared to cross his path, for he was as cunning as Tabaqui, as bold as the wild buffalo, and as reckless as the wounded elephant. But he had a voice as soft as wild honey dripping from a tree, and a skin softer than down.

– Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*

His hair was long and tangled and greasy, and hung down, and you could see his eyes shining through like he was behind vines. It was all black, no grey; so were his long whiskers. There was no colour in his face, where his face showed; it was white. Not like another man's white, but a white to make you sick, a white to make your flesh crawl – a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white. As for his clothes – just rags, that was all. He had one ankle resting on the other knee; the boot on that foot was busted, and two of his toes stuck through, and he worked them now and then. His hat was laying on the floor – an old black slouch with the top caved in, like a lid.

– Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

A green hunting cap squeezed the top of the fleshy balloon of a head. The green earflaps, full of large ears and uncut hair and the fine bristles that grew in the ears themselves, stuck out on either side like turn signals indicating two directions at once. Full, pursed lips protruded beneath the bushy black moustache and, at their corners, sank into little folds filled with disapproval and potato chip crumbs. In the shadow under the green visor of the cap, Ignatius J. Reilly's supercilious blue and yellow eyes looked down upon the other people waiting... studying the crowd for signs of bad taste in dress.

– John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces*

His hand was over his eyes. He looked like a failed soldier. Dirt seemed so worked into him that the lines of his face were like writing.

– China Miéville, *This Census-Taker*

Lord Asriel was a tall man with powerful shoulders, a fierce dark face, and eyes that seemed to flash and glitter with savage laughter. It was a face to be dominated by, or to fight: never a face to patronize or pity. All his movements were large and perfectly balanced, like those of a wild animal, and when he appeared in a room like this, he seemed a wild animal held in a cage too small for it.

– Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass*

Mama BekwaTataba stood watching us—a little jet-black woman. Her elbows stuck out like wings, and she carried a huge white enamelled tub on her head, which somewhat miraculously held steady while she moved in quick jerks to the right and left.

– Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible*

He was a compact, clear-cut man, with precise features, a lot of very soft black hair, and thoughtful dark brown eyes. He had a look of wariness, which could change when he felt relaxed or happy – not often in these difficult days – into a smile of amused friendliness and pleasure.

– A.S. Byatt, *Possession*

His heart was like a sensitive plant, that opens for a moment in the sunshine, but curls up and shrinks into itself at the slightest touch of the finger, or the lightest breath of wind.

– Anne Bronte, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

His long, long hair wafted around him like black smoke, its tendrils curling and moving of their own volition. His cloak — or perhaps that was his hair too — shifted as if in an unfelt wind.

– N.K. Jemisin, *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*

Peter was a gentle, red-haired bear of a man. Standing at six-four in his socks, he moved everywhere with a slight and nautical sway, but even though he was broad across the chest there was something centred and reassuring about him, like an old ship's mast cut from a single timber.

– Graham Joyce, *Some Kind of Fairy Tale*