

Characterization Words

CHAPTER 15

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The need to describe people arises constantly. You may write, for example, that Mr. More is a truck driver. That takes care of his occupation. But the reader may wish to know more about More. After all, truck drivers differ considerably in personality. One stops and changes a tire for you; another sideswipes your fender and jeers, "May I have the last dents?" The first is a *paragon*; the second is a *bungler*, a *ruffian*, or possibly—heaven forbid!—a *tippler*. Such characterization words can add a dimension to description.

This chapter is not about the names of jobs—architect, custodian, lion tamer—rather, it puts the spotlight on terms that characterize people.

A further challenge? Test your skill in the exercise at the end of this chapter involving an additional twenty-five characterization words.

COVER THIS STRIP ▼



EXERCISES

1. **bigot** (big'ət): a narrow-minded, prejudiced person.
2. **braggart** (brag'ərt): a very boastful person.
3. **buffoon** (bə-fōōn'): somebody who is always clowning around and trying to be funny.

bigot

- "Nobody of that racial group should ever get voted into this high-minded country club," said the *bi*_____.

braggart

- "I raised a hog so big that the snapshot of it weighs three pounds," said the *br*_____.

buffoon

- In my coat pocket was a fat frog, placed there by the class *bu*_____.

braggart

- Every village has its conceited *br*_____, its intolerant *b*_____, and its life-of-the-party, lampshade-wearing

bigot

*b*_____.

buffoon

- The fishing trip? "I caught barrels of sea bass," said the _____ . "I don't associate with common sailors," said the _____ . "I nailed my shorts to the top of the mast," snickered the _____ .

braggart

bigot

buffoon

4. **bungler**: a clumsy, blundering fellow.
5. **charlatan** (shär'lə-tən): a quack; one who pretends to have expertise, as in medicine, that he doesn't have.
6. **colleague** (kol'ēg): a fellow worker in the same profession.

colleague

- My professor was not in his office, so I spoke to his *co*_____.

bungler

- When the island "dentist" loosened the wrong tooth, I suspected he was a *bu*_____, but when he hit my skull with a coconut, I realized he was a *ch*_____.

charlatan

colleague

- "Professional ethics prevent you from bad-mouthing a *co*_____, " I said to the surgeon, "but I'm getting a heart transplant; and if your new *co*_____ is a diddling *ch*_____ or a clumsy *bu*_____, I'm coming back to haunt you."

colleague

charlatan, bungler

colleague ■ "Mr. Swindell is a former *co* _____ of mine," confided the lawyer, "and nobody is less qualified than that ignorant *bu* _____. His only expertise is to stage a car accident and sue for five million green ones. A first-class *ch* _____!"

7. **connoisseur** (kon'ə-sōōr'): an expert in a special field, generally in one of the fine arts or in matters of taste.
 8. **culprit**: one who is guilty of a crime or fault.
 9. **dilettante** (dil'i-tānt'): a dabbler in the arts and sciences; one who follows an art in a superficial way.

culprit ■ A one-fingered pickpocket stole a ring of keys from my pocket, but Detective Butts nabbed the *cu* _____.

connoisseur ■ Mr. Snorkel says our champagne is "frisky but somewhat unfocused." Only a *co* _____ of wine can talk like that.

dilettante ■ Hans poses as an expert in classical music, but his inane opinions show him to be a mere *di* _____.

connoisseur ■ A young girl, not at all an art *co* _____, saw a splash of ketchup on a Picasso—it had been unnoticed for several weeks—and we are now looking for the *cu* _____.

culprit (b) ■ Whether this is a fake Rembrandt should be determined by (a) a dilettante, (b) a connoisseur. () If we've been sold a forgery, we must go after the *cu* _____.

- | | | |
|--------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. (g) | () 1. culprit | a. a fine arts expert |
| 2. (e) | () 2. colleague | b. a clumsy fellow |
| 3. (h) | () 3. braggart | c. a quack; a false "healer" |
| 4. (f) | () 4. dilettante | d. a highly prejudiced person |
| 5. (d) | () 5. bigot | e. a fellow worker; an associate |
| 6. (a) | () 6. connoisseur | f. a dabbler in the arts |
| 7. (i) | () 7. buffoon | g. one guilty of a prank or crime |
| 8. (b) | () 8. bungler | h. a boaster |
| 9. (c) | () 9. charlatan | i. a clown type |

10. **felon** (fel'ən): a person who has committed a serious crime such as murder or burglary.
 11. **feminist**: one who advocates economic, social, and political rights for women equal to those of men.
 12. **glutton**: a person who greedily eats too much, or who has a great capacity for something. "I'm a *glutton* for soap operas."

glutton ■ "Tiny" Joe, a noted *gl* _____, ate six hot dogs.

feminist ■ Gloria, who despises male chauvinism, is an outspoken *fe* _____.

glutton ■ The robber whispered, "Hand it over, gal. I'm a *gl* _____ for cash." The bank clerk replied, "Straighten your tie. You're a *fe* _____ and you're on camera."

felon ■ Everybody has a dream. The *f* _____ dreams of equal pay for equal work; the *f* _____ dreams of a pardon from the governor; the *g* _____ dreams of roast pig.

glutton ■ "When I eat, sparks fly from my knife and fork." _____
 feminist ■ "Open those top jobs to women as well as men." _____
 felon ■ "Nineteen more years in the slammer. Wait for me, honey." _____

13. **gourmet** (goor'mā): a specialist in delicacies of the table; an excellent judge of fine foods and drink.
 14. **huckster**: an aggressive salesperson, possibly of vegetables, fruit, and small articles.
 15. **ingénue** (an'zhi-nōō'): the role in a play of the sweet, innocent, inexperienced young woman.

ingénue ■ Flora is too sophisticated and matronly to be cast as the *in* _____.

gourmet ■ "Grape tarts and mulled wine," ordered the *g* _____.

huckster ■ "Fish! Nice fresh fish!" cried the *h* _____.

gourmet ■ Mr. Fresser loves exotic delicacies of the table. In fact, he's a dedicated *g* _____.

huckster ■ A stadium *h* _____ sold me a bag of eight stale peanuts, not exactly *g* _____ food.

gourmet ■ Donna looks young, pretty, and a bit stupid—the director says she'll be a perfect *in* _____.

ingénue ■ "Buy your steel radials from Smiling Sam." _____

huckster ■ "Only a French chef understands frog legs." _____

gourmet ■ "Just a li'l girl from Dingville, and—pure luck!—already I been invited to this city feller's apartment tonight to look at his picture albums." _____

ingénue

16. **luminary**: a famous person inspirational to others.
17. **magnate** (mag' nāt): a powerful or influential person in business or industry.
18. **martyr** (mār' tər): one who suffers for a cause.
- magnate ■ Andrew Carnegie was an early steel *m*_____.
- martyr ■ Nathan Hale, hanged as a rebel, was a *m*_____.
- luminary ■ Among film comedians, Chaplin was a *lu*_____.
- Famous Americans of past years include Henry Ford, the automobile *m*_____, Ernest Hemingway, a *l*_____ among prose writers, and Martin Luther King, a *m*_____ to the cause of civil rights.
- More American heroes: Thomas Edison was a *l*_____ among inventors; James Hill was a railroad builder and *m*_____; and many a child has been a *m*_____ to our sweat shops.



QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. (c) | () 1. felon | a. a sweet, naive young woman |
| 2. (f) | () 2. feminist | b. one who suffers for ideals |
| 3. (e) | () 3. glutton | c. a criminal |
| 4. (h) | () 4. gourmet | d. a powerful industrial leader |
| 5. (a) | () 5. ingénue | e. a greedy eater |
| 6. (g) | () 6. huckster | f. an advocate of women's rights |
| 7. (i) | () 7. luminary | g. a pushy salesperson or peddler |
| 8. (d) | () 8. magnate | h. a lover of fine foods |
| 9. (b) | () 9. martyr | i. a famous person in some field |

19. **nomad** (nō' mad'): a wanderer without a fixed home.
20. **oracle**: one who makes wise or prophetic statements.
21. **pacifist**: one who is opposed to war and violence or who, as a matter of conscience, resists the draft.

- nomad ■ Hobo Hank travels everywhere. He's a *no*_____.
- oracle ■ How prophetic! Linda is a true *or*_____.

- pacifist ■ "In war, everybody loses," says the *pa*_____.
- oracle ■ More rain? Let's consult the weather *o*_____.
- nomad ■ Abou, a desert *n*_____, claims that a camel is really a horse put together by a committee.
- nomad "My tribe will wander the Sahara forever." _____
- pacifist "There never was a good war or a bad peace." _____
- oracle "I foresee a day when men and women will be judged only by their merit." _____
22. **paragon** (par' ə- gon'): one who is a model of excellence.
23. **patriarch** (pā' trē- ārk'): the aging father or ruler of a family or tribe.
24. **prodigy** (prod' i- jē): a remarkably talented child or person; a marvel.
- patriarch ■ The tribe was led by its white-haired *pat*_____.
- prodigy ■ The five-year-old chess *pr*_____ blitzed me.
- paragon ■ Jeeves, a *par*_____ among butlers, handled every detail.
- The Vesuvius eruption, burying Pompeii, was a tragic *pr*_____ of nature.
- prodigy ■ The priest eulogized the aged _____ of the clan, calling him a *par*_____ of virtue.
- Little Wolfgang will play the five concertos by memory. _____
- Sixty-two grandchildren danced at the picnic in his honor. _____
- Helpful, talented, loving—the perfect spouse! _____
25. **pundit**: a very learned person.
26. **raconteur** (rak' on- tūr'): a skilled teller of anecdotes.
27. **recluse** (rek' lōōs): one who lives alone; a hermit.
- raconteur ■ Salty stories poured out of the *ra*_____ like sewage from a broken main.
- We were dizzied by the philosophical lecture of the Harvard *pu*_____.
- recluse ■ Fear of crime turned Fred into a lonely *r*_____.

- (a) _____
- recluse _____
- raconteur _____
- pundit _____
- recluse _____
- raconteur _____
- Depth of learning is the mark of the (a) pundit, (b) recluse, (c) raconteur. ()
 - The holy cave-dweller, a genuine *rec* _____, nearly fainted at the racy jokes of the *ra* _____.
- "This is my third book on medieval culture." _____
- "I like living alone. People turn me off." _____
- "Did you hear the one about the old lady and the broccoli?" _____

QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. (f) | () 1. nomad | a. one who is opposed to war |
| 2. (d) | () 2. oracle | b. a hermit |
| 3. (a) | () 3. pacifist | c. an extremely gifted child |
| 4. (h) | () 4. paragon | d. one who is prophetic and wise |
| 5. (g) | () 5. patriarch | e. one who tells anecdotes |
| 6. (c) | () 6. prodigy | f. a wanderer |
| 7. (i) | () 7. pundit | g. the old ruler of a tribe |
| 8. (e) | () 8. raconteur | h. a model of excellence |
| 9. (b) | () 9. recluse | i. a very scholarly person |

28. **ruffian** (ruf'yən): a brutal, lawless person; a hoodlum.
29. **saboteur** (sab'ə-tūr'): one who deliberately damages machines or materials in time of war or labor disputes.
30. **schlemiel** (shlə-mēl'): *Slang.* an awkward unlucky person, easily victimized; a born loser.

- saboteur _____
- schlemiel _____
- ruffian _____
- saboteur _____
- schlemiel _____
- ruffian _____
- We caught the *sab* _____ just as he was pouring mucilage into the fludbunnies.
 - Tore his pants on the piano? What a *sc* _____!
 - The Good Humor man was brutally beaten by a bad-humored *ruf* _____.
 - The factory explosion was caused not by a *sa* _____, but by a *sc* _____ who stumbled and dropped a torpedo.
 - In the alley I met a *ru* _____ who had knifed more people than a surgeon.

saboteur
ruffian
schlemiel

skeptic
tippler

skeptic
tycoon
tippler

skeptic
tycoon
tippler

virtuoso
urchin
zealot
virtuoso
zealot
urchin

"I fixed the guns so they shoot backwards." _____

"Let's beat up on them little guys. . . ." _____

"I fell on my back and broke my nose." _____

31. **skeptic**: one with a doubting attitude toward matters that most people accept.
32. **tippler**: one who habitually drinks small quantities of alcoholic beverages.
33. **tycoon** (tī-kōon'): a wealthy and powerful industrialist or businessperson.

- A flat earth? Columbus was a *sk* _____ about that.
- My uncle, a chronic *ti* _____, drinks to calm himself. Sometimes he gets so calm he can't move.
- Oswald Spengler, in *The Decline of the West*, is a *sk* _____ about our future.
- Jason's career as an industrial *ty* _____ was ruined when he became a *ti* _____. "I took a snort only at odd hours—one, three, five. . . ."

"What good is space travel? It's for the birds." _____

"Our Cadillac franchises really paid off." _____

"I'm not so think as I drunk I am." _____

34. **urchin**: a small mischievous boy; any youngster.
35. **virtuoso** (vūr'chōō-ō'sō): a person with a dazzling technique in an art such as music.
36. **zealot** (zel'ət): one who is extremely devoted to a cause; a fanatic.

- Paganini was a noted violin *vi* _____.
- I chased the *ur* _____ who'd let the air out of our tires.
- "Home run!" The Dodger *z* _____ behind me pounded my back.
- Hoping to become a flute *v* _____, I asked the maestro about my execution. He favored it.
- I'm an antiviolence *z* _____, but if I ever catch the *ur* _____ who dumped manure into my swimming pool, I'll kick him into orbit.

zealot

urchin

virtuoso

Velma is passionately involved in the antivivisection crusade.

Please excuse Jimmy for being tardy yesterday. He was playing marbles. _____

The cellist gave a brilliant interpretation of Shnook's intricate "Sonata in Six Flats and a Basement." _____



QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. (b) | () 1. ruffian | a. a mischievous child |
| 2. (e) | () 2. saboteur | b. a hoodlum |
| 3. (f) | () 3. schlemiel | c. a fanatic for a cause |
| 4. (h) | () 4. skeptic | d. a wealthy captain of industry |
| 5. (g) | () 5. tippler | e. a war machine wrecker |
| 6. (d) | () 6. tycoon | f. a clumsy, unlucky person |
| 7. (i) | () 7. virtuoso | g. one who hits the bottle |
| 8. (a) | () 8. urchin | h. a doubter; a nonbeliever |
| 9. (c) | () 9. zealot | i. a brilliant instrumentalist |



REVIEW TEST

Write the word studied in this chapter that will complete the sentence.

- Only six and she studies calculus? A child *pr* _____!
- Ingersoll doubted miracles and became a religious *sk* _____.
- Joan of Arc died at the stake, a *ma* _____ to her faith.
- To foresee the future, the Greeks consulted an *or* _____.
- "Thou shalt not exploit women"—thus saith the *fem* _____.
- Hank crowed that he would make four touchdowns, but the *br* _____ lost yardage.
- "Popcorn! Buy your popcorn here," wheedled the *hu* _____.
- In "My Sister Eileen" she starred as the innocent, lovable young woman—the *in* _____.
- Should this mother of twelve bring yet another *ur* _____ into this inhospitable world?
- Extremely knowledgeable, Samuel Johnson was the *pu* _____ of his era.
- If he claims his medicine cures cancer, he's probably a *ch* _____.
- The venerable *ra* _____ pelted us with a stream of baseball anecdotes.

Write True or False.

- _____ 13. A business *tycoon* is a *magnate*.
- _____ 14. A *pacifist* is a *ruffian*.
- _____ 15. A *schlemiel* is a *bungler*.
- _____ 16. A *gourmet* is a *connoisseur*.
- _____ 17. A *dilettante* is a *virtuoso*.
- _____ 18. A *recluse* is a *nomad*.
- _____ 19. In time of war, a *saboteur* is a *felon*.
- _____ 20. Both the *tippler* and the *glutton* consume too much.

Matching. Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| () 21. bigot | a. a fanatic |
| () 22. buffoon | b. a hunter of jungle animals |
| () 23. culprit | c. a big industrial leader |
| () 24. paragon | d. a prejudiced person |
| () 25. zealot | e. one guilty of a crime or offense |
| | f. an insane person |
| | g. one given to pranks and clowning |
| | h. a flawless person; a role model |

KEY TO REVIEW TEST

Check your test answers with the following key. Deduct 4% per error from a possible 100%.

- | | | |
|-------------|---------------|----------|
| 1. prodigy | 10. pundit | 19. True |
| 2. skeptic | 11. charlatan | 20. True |
| 3. martyr | 12. raconteur | 21. (d) |
| 4. oracle | 13. True | 22. (g) |
| 5. feminist | 14. False | 23. (e) |
| 6. braggart | 15. True | 24. (h) |
| 7. huckster | 16. True | 25. (a) |
| 8. ingénue | 17. False | |
| 9. urchin | 18. False | |

Score: _____ %

SUPPLEMENTARY EXERCISE

Fill in the blanks at the left with the characterization words that fit the definitions. Although these words were not defined in this chapter, you should recognize most of them. Check your answers with the key at the end of the exercise. Use your dictionary to study any unknown words.

- antagonist, apostate, aristocrat, avenger, cherub
 1. _____ one who punishes to get even
 2. _____ one who has deserted his or her faith
 3. _____ an angelic child
 4. _____ an opponent; an adversary
 5. _____ a member of a proud, privileged class
- clodhopper, confidant, conniver, disciple, dowager
 6. _____ an elderly woman of dignity and wealth
 7. _____ *Informal.* A country hick
 8. _____ one who cooperates with evildoers
 9. _____ a person entrusted with secrets
 10. _____ a follower of a teacher or doctrine
- factotum, jingoist, mendicant, orphan, pagan
 11. _____ somebody hired to do all sorts of work
 12. _____ a child without parents; a castoff
 13. _____ one who favors a warlike foreign policy
 14. _____ a heathen
 15. _____ a beggar
- paraplegic, parasite, parvenu, reactionary, scavenger
 16. _____ an extreme conservative in politics
 17. _____ one who searches through rubbish
 18. _____ one who lives at the expense of another
 19. _____ a paralyzed person
 20. _____ one who is newly rich; an upstart

■ sycophant, tenant, thespian, truant, turncoat

21. _____ a traitor
22. _____ a student who skips school
23. _____ a self-serving flatterer
24. _____ one who occupies some property
25. _____ an actor or actress



KEY TO SUPPLEMENTARY EXERCISE

Check your test answers with the following key. Deduct 4% per error from a possible 100%.

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. avenger | 10. disciple | 19. paraplegic |
| 2. apostate | 11. factotum | 20. parvenu |
| 3. cherub | 12. orphan | 21. turncoat |
| 4. antagonist | 13. jingoist | 22. truant |
| 5. aristocrat | 14. pagan | 23. sycophant |
| 6. dowager | 15. mendicant | 24. tenant |
| 7. clodhopper | 16. reactionary | 25. thespian |
| 8. conniver | 17. scavenger | |
| 9. confidant | 18. parasite | |

Score: _____%