SHORT STORIES CHARACTER

Understanding the main Character and Point of View
Plot and character are different elements in fiction, but they bear a definite relationship to one another. If plot and character are considered two ends of a see-saw, as fiction passes from escape to interpretation, the character end is likely to hold more weight, since the mature reader is less interested in the actions done than the characters doing them.
Interpretive fiction = more importance placed on character(s)

Plot / Action = less importance placed on character(s)

Character
The Importance of Character in Interpretive Literature
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Escape fiction emphasizes plot and presents characters who are clearly labelled good or bad and not very complex. The main character must be an attractive one with whom the reader can identify to give him or her a pleasant image of him/herself.

Super Heroes are the ultimate expressions of this.... most of the time. SuperMan certainly is.

- Never lies
- Always honourable
- Asks for nothing
  ... Rather boring
Of course we have our stock villains as well....
Character

The Importance of Character in Interpretive Literature

Interpretive fiction gives a greater variety of characters, less easily labelled, sometimes unsympathetic, of varying degrees of goodness, complex, and sometimes contradictory.

Sticking with the comic book analogy for a moment....The Punisher is a decent example of a more complex character.

- Lost his family to criminals in a random shootout
- Tormented by the past, by guilt, by remorse
- Hunts criminals of all kinds, acts as both judge and executioner.
- Hunted by criminals and the law alike
- Vows never to kill a cop
And yes, Batman is complex too.
Character Presentation
How the characters are revealed to us

Direct Presentation
When the author tells us straight out, or has one of his characters tell us what a certain character is like, he/she is using this. Its advantage is that it is clear and economical, but it should never be used alone.
Character Presentation
How the characters are revealed to us

**Indirect Presentation**
Here the author shows us the character in action and we learn what he/she is like from what he/she thinks, says, or does. It is the most convincing method of character presentation and is therefore used primarily in Interpretive Literature... and well-done Escape Literature.
Three Rules

To be convincing, characterization must also observe three other principles:

1. The character must be **consistent**. He or she must not behave one way on one occasion and a different way on another, unless there is a clear reason for the change.
2. The character must be motivated. He or she must have a reason for his or her actions. Particularly if there is a change in behaviour, the reader must understand why that change occurs... if not immediately, then certainly by the end of the story.
3. The character must be plausible or lifelike. He or she should be neither a paragon of virtue nor a monster of evil, and the reader must feel that such a person could appear in the normal world... or at least the world the author has created.
Descriptions of Characters
Types of Characters and how much/little they change

**Flat Character**
This character has only one of two traits, and can usually be summed up in one sentence.

A special type of flat character is the **Stock Character**. This is a stereotyped figure that has occurred so often in fiction that he/she is immediately recognized. Stock characters can be transferred from one story to another without loss of efficiency.
Round Character
This character is complex and many sided. He/She may have contradictory characteristics, and would require a good essay for analysis.
Both flat and round characters are necessary in fiction and may each be given vitality.

Good fiction requires that each character be developed fully enough to justify his/her role in the story.

Most short stories will have room for one or two round characters; the others must necessarily remain flat.
Static Character

This character is basically the same at the end of the story as he or she was at the beginning. The situation or lifestyle may change, but the character remains the same.

This is especially true for sitcom characters. Viewers need to be able to watch any episode in any order, and have the main characters remain consistent throughout. The same can be said for most book series featuring the same character.
Dynamic (Developing) Character

This character undergoes some permanent change in some aspect of his or her personality, character, or outlook on life.

The change may be large or small, for better or worse, but it must be something important and basic.

There is not room for many dynamic characters in most fiction; in a short story there is likely only room for one. In longer works, there can be more. Large books, sequential book series, and TV series may have numerous dynamic characters.
Often change occurs in a protagonist as a result of a crucial event in his or her life.

In an interpretive short story, this change is often the surest clue to the story’s meaning.

In escape fiction, the change may be merely to ensure a happy ending.
To be convincing, a change must meet 3 conditions:

1. It must be within the possibilities of the character who makes it.

2. It must be sufficiently motivated by the circumstances the character is experiencing.

3. There must be sufficient time for a change of its magnitude to take place.
A Character Foil
A character who is designed to contrast in some way with another character. By this contrast, the individual characteristics of each is enhanced.

Ie: Gandalf and Sauron
Primary Characters

These are the most important characters in the story. Primary characters are the **Protagonist** (the main character) and the **Antagonist** (the character or force that opposes the main character)
Secondary Characters

These characters are important to the story, but not as important as the primary characters.
Minor Characters

These characters add interest to the story, but if left out, would not change the story in any significant way.