Show Character Through Setting and Choice

Teacher		**Class**	Year 7
Subject	English	**Topic**	Writing about a character
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United Kingdom

Students learn how setting, plot and characterisation create effects on the reader. They write a short speech, action and thought exchange that reveals character.

Curriculum links

- Studying narrative, characters, settings and themes [1]
- Writing narratives and descriptions [1]

Learning objectives

- Students will explain how setting shapes behaviour and feelings.
- Students will link a plot choice to what a character values.
- Students will write speech, action and thought to reveal character.

Success criteria

- I can explain how setting changes what a character does.
- I can link a plot choice to what a character cares about.
- I can write speech, action and thought that show character.

What students already know

Ask: What is the difference between setting and plot? Listen for where/when versus what happens and a choice. Quick hands-up on one trait shown by action, not told.

Key words

setting	where and when a story happens [1]
plot	what happens, often a problem followed by a choice [1]
characterisation	how a writer shows what someone is like [1]
effect	how writing makes a reader feel, think or judge

Materials

- Slide deck 1-12 with projector and board
- Video clip 2 Guessing Character Descriptions (0:00-5:00) on slide 8
- Role cards for Student A (late, honest) and Student B (calm, annoyed)
- Lined paper and pencils
- Worksheet Task G: Colour by group for sorting speech, action or thought

Before the lesson

- Print role cards for Student A (late, honest) and Student B (calm, annoyed), one set per pair
- Print Worksheet Task G, one per pair, plus lined paper
- Test slide 8 video clip 2 Guessing Character Descriptions (0:00-5:00) for sound and picture
- Set slide 9 task instructions up to show during independent writing

Lesson outline

0–5 min **Starter** 5 min · Whole class

Hook students into showing character rather than telling it.

YOU DO

1. Show Slides 1-2 and read the objectives for today.
2. Deliver the hook: Never tell me a character is kind. Make me believe it from one line they say.
3. Take two quick offers of a kind line and ask what the reader learns without the word kind.
4. Link to today's goal: write speech, action and thought that reveal character.

STUDENTS DO

1. Listen to objectives and hook.
2. Offer one-line examples and explain what each line shows.
3. Repeat back the three tools: speech, action and thought.

Say: Today we are bringing characters to life. Do not tell me someone is kind or nervous. Prove it with what they say, what they do, and what they think. By the end you will write an exchange that shows character.

Ask: What is better evidence: she was nervous, or her voice shook? (Her voice shook, because it shows nerves through action and voice.) · What will you include today to reveal character? (Speech, action and thought, plus a final choice.)

Check understanding: Thumbs up if you can name speech, action and thought. If unsure, point to Slide 2 objectives again and chant the three.

Support: Give sentence stem: She is kind because she says... **Stretch:** Ask for a line that sounds kind but could hide worry, and why it works.

Use: Slides 1-2

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5–15 min **Teaching** 10 min · Whole class

Explain how setting shapes behaviour and how a plot choice shows values.

YOU DO

1. Show Slides 3-5 and teach setting, plot, characterisation and effect in simple terms.
2. Model the same nervous new student in two places: cold empty corridor and noisy canteen at lunch.
3. Think aloud how posture, voice and thoughts change and state Slide 7 idea: a problem forces a choice and the choice shows character.
4. Link to Year 7 move from Key Stage 2 spelling, punctuation and grammar to analysis of language [1].

STUDENTS DO

1. Copy the four key words and meanings.
2. Compare the two setting versions and name what changed.
3. Predict which choice each version makes and what it shows.

Say: Setting is where and when a story happens. Plot is what happens - a problem and a choice. Readers believe what characters do, not what they are told. A shaky voice in a cold corridor shows nerves without the word nervous.

Worked example: Corridor version: The student whispers, takes slow steps, gripping bag tight. Thought: Everyone will stare. Canteen version: The same student shouts to be heard, rushes, keeps head down. Setting changes body, voice and thoughts, but the plot problem is the same: risk speaking or stay silent.

Ask: How would a nervous new student act alone here? (Whispering, slow steps, gripping bag - place changes body, voice and thoughts.) · If the student speaks up despite nerves, what does that choice show? (That they value honesty or courage more than comfort.) · What is the effect on the reader? (We feel sympathy or tension and judge them as brave.)

Check understanding: Mini whiteboards: write one setting detail and one behaviour it causes. Scan; reteach with corridor versus canteen if vague.

Support: Underline key setting words in advance and give stem: The setting makes the character seem...
Stretch: Suggest a third setting that would make the character seem braver and justify the choice.

Use: Slides 3-5

15–25 min **Guided practice** 10 min · Pairs

Practise spotting and labelling speech, action and thought.

YOU DO

1. Play Video clip 2 Guessing Character Descriptions (0:00-5:00) on slide 8 and ask pairs to steal one strong verb or voice idea.
2. Model labelling: speech is spoken words, action is body and voice, thought in brackets is inner worry or plan.
3. Hand out Worksheet Task G and guide pairs to colour each box by speech, action or thought.
4. Check answers and stress matching writing to an audience and a purpose [2].

STUDENTS DO

1. Watch the clip and note one appearance detail and one voice clue.
2. Complete Worksheet Task G in pairs, colouring each box by speech, action or thought.
3. Share one strong verb or voice idea to steal for writing.

Say: Watch for speech and action clues. Guess the person from what they say and do. Then we will sort lines into speech, action and thought so you can use all three in your own writing.

Worked example: Line 1 speech: I'm really sorry — the bus was late! Line 2 action: Hands shaking, bag slipping off shoulder. Line 3 thought: (Oh no, they'll think I don't care.) Each one proves honesty and nerves without saying honest or nervous.

Ask: Is hands shaking speech, action or thought? (Action, because it is what the body does and shows feeling.) · Why include thought in brackets? (It reveals motive and worry the character would not say aloud.)

Check understanding: Hold up Task G; all speech one colour, action second, thought third. Re-model one box if mixed, then pairs fix.

Support: Provide a model paragraph with the three parts labelled in different colours. **Stretch:** Explain which line hits hardest and why: vivid setting, bold choice or strong voice?

Use: Video clip 2 (0:00-5:00)

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25–45 min **Main activity** 20 min · Pairs

Write a short exchange where speech, action, thought and choice reveal character.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 9 and give roles: Be Student A (late, honest) or B (calm, annoyed).
2. Set choices: canteen, rainy bus stop or corridor; include speech, action and (thought) plus a final choice.
3. Remind pairs to let the plot problem force honesty versus hiding, and circulate prompting for setting details.
4. Stop at 15 minutes for partner swap: underline best line and label speech, action or thought.

STUDENTS DO

1. Take roles A or B and choose one setting.
2. Draft six to eight lines including speech, action, thought and a final choice.
3. Swap with partner, underline the line that best shows character and label it.

Say: You are Student A who is late but honest, or Student B who is calm but annoyed. Choose the canteen, rainy bus stop or corridor. Write six to eight lines with speech, action and thought in brackets, ending with a choice. Show, do not tell.

Worked example: Student A speech: I’m so sorry — the rain held the bus up! Action: Wringing wet sleeve, not meeting eyes. Thought: (Tell the truth even if I get detention.) Student B speech: You’re twenty minutes late. Action: Arms folded, voice flat and quiet. Thought: (Stay calm, hear them out first.) Final choice: Student A offers to catch up at lunch, showing honesty matters more than excuses.

Ask: How does your setting change voice and body? (Busy places force rushing and shouting; empty places force whispering and slow steps.) · What does your final choice show you value? (E.g. honesty, fairness or calm, shown by owning lateness or listening first.)

Check understanding: Read two pairs aloud; class names trait and evidence. If speech only, prompt to add one action and one thought.

Support: Provide a model paragraph with the three parts labelled in different colours. **Stretch:** Rewrite one line of dialogue so it sounds polite but the action shows the opposite feeling.

Use: Slide 9

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45–60 min **Plenary** 15 min · Whole class

Judge which technique creates the strongest effect on the reader.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 10 to contrast same choice in noisy canteen or silent corridor.
2. Run think, pair, share on Slide 11: Which hits hardest: vivid setting, bold choice, or strong voice? Why?
3. Run Slide 12 quick quiz live and demand evidence with quotations.
4. Return to Slide 2 I can statements and set homework.

STUDENTS DO

1. Think, pair, share a verdict with evidence.
2. Answer quiz true/false with reasons.
3. Self-assess against I can statements.

Say: Same choice feels different in a noisy canteen or silent corridor. Think, then tell your partner which hits hardest: vivid setting, bold choice, or strong voice. Give one quotation as proof of the effect on the reader.

Ask: Setting only tells where a story happens. True or false? (False - it shapes mood and behaviour too.) · If a writer showed a character standing up to a bully in front of a crowd, how would that change the effect? (Witnesses raise risk and pressure, so courage feels bigger and the reader judges it more strongly.) · Which hits hardest for you and why? (Any justified answer linking setting, choice or voice to reader feeling, with a quotation.)

Check understanding: Exit tickets on paper: one sentence starting The setting makes the character seem... plus trait and proof. Collect; reteach next lesson if effect is missing.

Support: Provide two focused questions and sentence stem: This makes the reader feel... because... **Stretch:** Explain how the effect would change if the same plot happened in an empty playground with no witnesses.

Use: Slides 10-12

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Telling the trait instead of showing it, e.g. he was nervous.	Writing uses nervous, kind, angry with no speech, action or thought as proof.	Swap for voice and body: whispering, slow steps, gripping bag [1].
Treating setting as background that does not change behaviour.	Same posture and voice in corridor and canteen.	Add two setting-driven changes: busy places force rushing and shouting; empty places force whispering and slow steps.
Mixing up speech, action and thought.	Labels in Task G or swap are wrong, e.g. thought written as spoken line.	Use punctuation test: speech in quotes, thought in brackets, action is body/voice with no quotes.

Support

- Provide a model paragraph with the three parts labelled in different colours
- Give trait bank and sentence starters such as This shows and The setting makes the character seem
- Underline key setting words in advance and limit choices to one setting per pair

Stretch

- Rewrite one line of dialogue so it sounds polite but the action shows the opposite feeling
- Suggest a third setting that would make the character seem braver and justify the choice
- Explain how the effect would change with no witnesses, starting This makes the reader feel

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For the LSE or teaching assistant

Sit with pairs needing support during Task G and main writing; prompt labelling with colours, scribe setting detail if needed, and push stretch writers to add contrasting action.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer
Give one action that shows nerves without using the word nervous.	E.g. whispering / gripping bag / hands shaking.
A character owns up though they may be punished. What does the choice show?	They value honesty/courage over comfort; the reader judges them as brave/honest.
Label this: (I must tell the truth.) - speech, action or thought?	Thought, inner motive not spoken aloud.

Homework

Rewrite your best two lines in a new setting and note the effect change in one sentence.

Sources

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