Analysing character
Stage 4

Overview

Purpose

This literacy teaching strategy supports teaching and learning for Stage 4 students across all key learning areas. It targets specific literacy skills and suggests a learning sequence to build skill development. Teachers can select individual tasks, or a sequence, and embed into their teaching and learning program according to their students' needs. While exemplar texts are provided throughout this resource, it is recommended that teachers select texts which are relevant to their students and curriculum.

Learning intention

Students will learn to analyse texts to identify how characters are portrayed.

Syllabus outcome

The following teaching and learning strategies will assist in covering elements of the following outcomes:

- EN4-RVL-01: uses a range of personal, creative and critical strategies to read texts that are complex in their ideas and construction

- EN4-URA-01: analyses how meaning is created through the use of and response to language forms, features and structures

- EN4-1A: responds to and composes texts for understanding, interpretation, critical analysis, imaginative expression and pleasure

- EN4-2A: effectively uses a widening range of processes, skills, strategies and knowledge for responding to and composing texts in different media and technologies

NSW English K-10 Syllabus (2022)

Visit the Leading curriculum K-12 website for more information on the syllabus implementation timeline.

Success criteria

The following Year 7 NAPLAN item descriptors may guide teachers to co-construct success criteria for student learning.

- identifies how a character is portrayed in a narrative

- identifies how a character is portrayed in an information text

- infers the reason for a character's actions in a narrative

- infers the reason for a character's actions in a text

- interprets a character's feelings in a narrative

National Literacy Learning Progression guide

Understanding Texts (UnT9-UnT11)

Key: C=comprehension P=process V=vocabulary

UnT9

- draws inferences, synthesising clues and evidence across a text (C)
- distils information from a number of texts according to task and purpose (e.g. uses graphic organisers) (C)
- selects reading/viewing strategies appropriate to reading purpose (e.g. scans text for key phrase or close reading for learning (P)

UnT10

- draws inferences using evidence from the text and discounting possible inferences that are not supported by the text (C)
- integrates automatically a range of processes such as predicting, confirming predictions, monitoring, and connecting relevant elements of the text to build meaning (P)

UnT11

- analyses the cumulative impact of use of language features and vocabulary across texts (C)
- strategically adjusts the processes of reading and viewing to build meaning according to the demands of tasks and texts (P)

National Literacy Learning Progression

Evidence base

- Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2017). [Effective reading instruction in the early years of school](#), literature review.
- Oakhill, J., Cain, K. & Elbro, C. (2015). Understanding and teaching reading comprehension: A handbook. Routledge.
- Quigley, A. (2020). Closing the reading gap. Routledge.
- Scarborough, H.S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickson (Eds.), Handbook for research in early literacy (pp. 97-110). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Alignment to system priorities and/or needs: [Five priorities for Literacy and Numeracy](#), [Our Plan for NSW Public Education](#), [School Excellence Policy (nsw.gov.au)](#).

Alignment to School Excellence Framework: Learning domain: Curriculum, Teaching domain: Effective classroom practice and Professional standards

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Teaching strategies

Task	Appendices
Character discovery	Appendix 1 - Character traits
Character traits and behaviours	Appendix 2 - Scenario cards Appendix 3 - Student scaffold: wizard character comparison Appendix 4 - Student scaffold: character comparison Appendix 5 - Student scaffold: character portrayal
Character development	Appendix 6 - Pivotal moment and character development
Protagonist and antagonist	Appendix 7 - Understanding protagonist and antagonist
Inferring a character's point of view	Appendix 8 – Harry Potter text excerpt Appendix 9 - STEAL completed teacher example Appendix 10 - STEAL student example

Background information:

Further information on English textual concepts can be found on the department's curriculum textual concepts web page.

Character

Character is traditionally viewed as a description of a fictional person. As a construct, it is made up of verbal or visual statements about what that fictional person does, says and thinks and what other fictional characters and the author of the text say about him or her. The reader, listener or viewer fleshes out these statements to imagine a person-like character, sufficiently individualised and coherent to establish the sense of an identity. In this way, representation of a 'real' person invites personal identification and judgements about the character's morality and value to their society. This kind of analysis can contribute to shaping one's own sense of a moral and ethical self and so becoming a way of enculturation.

Characters may also be created and/or read as representations of ideas, of groups of people or of types that serve a function in a narrative genre. Questions of characterisation then focus on the ways a character is constructed both by the responder and the composer and its function in the text.

Character is an important concept in narrative as a driver of the action, a function in the plot, a way of engaging or positioning a reader or as a way of representing its thematic concerns. The way character is read is an indication of particular approaches to texts, be it through personal engagement or critical response.

Where to next?

- Inference
- Literal comprehension
- Author perspective and bias

Overview of teaching strategies

Purpose

These literacy teaching strategies support teaching and learning from Stage 2 to Stage 5. They are linked to NAPLAN task descriptors, syllabus outcomes and literacy and numeracy learning progressions.

These teaching strategies target specific literacy and numeracy skills and suggest a learning sequence to build skill development. Teachers can select individual tasks or a sequence to suit their students.

Access points

The resources can be accessed from:

- NAPLAN App in Scout using the teaching strategy links from NAPLAN items
- NSW Department of Education Literacy and numeracy website.

What works best

Explicit teaching practices involve teachers clearly explaining to students why they are learning something, how it connects to what they already know, what they are expected to do, how to do it and what it looks like when they have succeeded. Students are given opportunities and time to check their understanding, ask questions and receive clear, effective feedback.

This resource reflects the latest evidence base and can be used by teachers as they plan for explicit teaching.

Teachers can use classroom observations and assessment information to make decisions about when and how they use this resource as they design teaching and learning sequences to meet the learning needs of their students.

Further support with What works best is available.

Differentiation

When using these resources in the classroom, it is important for teachers to consider the needs of all students, including Aboriginal and EAL/D learners.

EAL/D learners will require explicit English language support and scaffolding, informed by the Enhanced EAL/D enhanced teaching and learning cycle and the student's phase on the EAL/D Learning Progression. Teachers can access information about supporting EAL/D learners and literacy and numeracy support specific to EAL/D learners.

Learning adjustments enable students with disability and additional learning and support needs to access syllabus outcomes and content on the same basis as their peers. Teachers can use a range of adjustments to ensure a personalised approach to student learning.

Assessing and identifying high potential and gifted learners will help teachers decide which students may benefit from extension and additional challenge. Effective strategies and contributors to achievement for high potential and gifted learners helps teachers to identify and target areas for growth and improvement. A differentiation adjustment tool can be found on the High potential and gifted education website.

Using tasks across learning areas

This resource may be used across learning areas where it supports teaching and learning aligned with syllabus outcomes.

Literacy and numeracy are embedded throughout all syllabus documents as general capabilities. As the English and mathematics learning areas have a particular role in developing literacy and numeracy, NSW English and Mathematics syllabus outcomes aligned to literacy and numeracy skills have been identified.

Text selection

Example texts are used throughout this resource. Teachers can adjust activities to use texts which are linked to their unit of learning.

Further support with text selection can be found within the National Literacy Learning Progression Text Complexity appendix.

The NESA website has additional information on text requirements within the NSW English syllabus.

Teaching strategies

Character discovery

1. Word chain*:* Teacher identifies a character or person familiar to the class; this may be from a current text being studied or an eminent person, such as the current Prime Minister of Australia or historical figure. Students build a picture of the character by adding a trait at a time, building on the last one. For example, stoic – reserved – fearsome. Record word chains and discuss connections between the vocabulary.

2. Brainstorm: Students share and define meanings of a variety of traits and behaviours characters they have either read about, or developed themselves, may have exhibited. Scribe onto posters around the classroom or a digital version using character traits to help (refer to Appendix 1 - Character traits). Students think of a character or person who may display the trait and add this onto the posters.

   Additional task: Add synonyms in one colour and antonyms in another.

Character traits and behaviours

1. **Character Hot Seat:** Students pick a character from a well-known text or a text being currently read and studied such as Harry Potter, Katniss Everdeen, Santa Claus. Students then respond 'in-character' with what they might think, say, and do in response to scenario cards (refer to Appendix 2 - Scenario cards). Students can interview the character to ascertain who they are. Students may also add challenges or obstacles to see how the character might respond.
   Alternative task: Teachers may allocate a character and a scenario to a small group. The group then composes a short skit, and the class works to identify them through questioning the character portrayal within their skit.

2. Students compare two similar characters from different texts, for example, students might compare the two wizards Dumbledore and Gandalf from Harry Potter series and The Hobbit. Using an excerpt from the texts that focuses on the character's description, students read how the two different wizards compare and use the 'Wizard character comparison' (Appendix 3 - Student scaffold: wizard character comparison). It might be helpful to search for images of the two characters to support students who may not know the two wizards.

3. Students then use Appendix 4 - Student scaffold: character comparison to synthesise the information on both characters as a way to organise their thinking and draw connections between how wizards are represented in texts. Students give a judgement as to which techniques they found the most effective in conveying the character to them. Discuss which wizard did they feel they 'knew' the best?

   Additional task: Students can further research wizards through texts across a span of time to further develop understanding of how characters are portrayed.

4. Character Portrayal: Students use a text currently being examined to unpack the protagonist or antagonist in the story. Students use Appendix 5 - Student scaffold: character portrayal to guide the analysis and answer questions about: What does the character look like? What so they say? What

are their actions? What do their action suggest about their character/attitudes/beliefs? What is their attitude? How do other characters think and feel about them? What conflicts do they face? What are they goals? Do they have any good or bad memories? Do they have any habits or quirks? What are their flaws or shortcomings?

Additional task: Students could create a Venn diagram to compare the traits, actions and vocabulary of the protagonist and the antagonist.

Character development

1. Discuss that within a story, a character (usually the protagonist or antagonist) will often have a pivotal moment where a change occurs, where they learn something and the character evolves. Teacher models reading a quality picture book such as Anthony Browne's 'Zoo'. Read the text to the students, having them brainstorm on sticky notes: Who is the main character? What traits and actions match this character? Discuss: What was the moment the character changed? What happened before and after? Model adding details into the table 'pivotal moment and character development' (Appendix 6 - Pivotal moment and character development).

2. Students choose a character from a text recently analysed or from a familiar text and identify the moment the character changes. An alternative to a novel or current text might be to use a picture book or traditional fairy tales.

Protagonist and antagonist

1. Display the term 'protagonist' for students to explain their understanding of this character in a story. The protagonist is the main character where the story line revolves around them and their conflict. Come up with a list of examples, such as Katniss Everdeen from the Hunger Games, Wilbur from Charlotte's Web, Romeo and Juliet are both protagonist in Shakespeare's play. Students add ideas to Appendix 7 - Understanding protagonist and antagonist. With each protagonist, students identify the conflict each are facing and add to Appendix 7.

2. Discuss: must a protagonist be perceived as 'good' to be considered a protagonist? Why or why not? Even though the protagonist is often shown as a hero or good, often overcoming evil, the protagonist may also be 'bad' or an anti-hero, for example, the Grinch in 'The Grinch that stole Christmas'. When a protagonist is not seen as 'good', there is often a lack of sympathy from the reader and may need to be hooked into the storyline to keep connected to the text. Another example of a protagonist viewed as 'bad' or unkind could be Scrooge from 'A Christmas Carol'.

3. Display the term 'antagonist' for students to explain their understanding of this character in a story. An antagonist is a character or a force that opposes the protagonist; they are often the source of a problem and will be part of the conflict the protagonist must overcome. Share some examples that partner with the protagonist brainstorm and add to Appendix 7.

4. Discuss that the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist is seen in texts throughout time. The protagonist and an antagonist are a story's most essential characters. Tension between the two competing to achieve conflicting goals helps a story build momentum. Brainstorm some examples

such as Harry Potter and Lord Voldermort, Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty or Lyra and Mrs Coulter (*Northern Lights*).

5. Readers theatre: Pairs of students are given a famous duo or protagonist and antagonist to enact in an interview. Students interview the 'characters' to determine who they are by the relationship they display.

    Alternate task: Students create a series of 3-5 freeze frames or poses to indicate the duo, for example Sherlock Holmes and Watson, Batman and Robin, Harry Potter and Voldemort.

Inferring a character's point of view

1. Discuss with students that there are a number of ways an author might develop a character. When the author describes the character through a narrative or the character reveals something about her/himself, they are using direct or *explicit characterisation*. In J. K. Rowling's 'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone,' she describes Harry in this way.

'Perhaps it had something to do with living in a dark cupboard, but Harry had always been small and skinny for his age. He looked even smaller and skinnier than he really was because all he had to wear were old clothes of Dudley's, and Dudley was about four times bigger than he was. Harry had a thin face, knobbly knees, black hair, and bright green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with a lot of Scotch tape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose. The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead that was shaped like a bolt of lightning.'

Sometimes the author challenges the reader to decide for themselves what a character is like through their speech, thoughts, actions, or interaction with other characters. When this occurs, they are using indirect or *implicit characterisation*. This requires the audience to make inferences about why a character would say or do those things (refer to Stage 4 reading – Inference for more information).

2. The teacher provides a range of extracts from texts which reveal key character attributes. These should be sourced from texts relevant to a current unit of learning, or refer to Appendix 8 – Harry Potter text excerpt. The teacher provides context for the extract(s) and discusses how narrative perspective can affect our perception of character. For example, if the author has written the text using first person narration there may be a lot of inner dialogue which reveals the character's thoughts, opinions and perspective. This may require us, as the readers, to get more involved and infer differences between the characters thoughts and actions. Whereas a third person narration may require the reader to infer a character's thoughts based on their actions.

3. After reading the text, explain to students that to understand characters and how they are portrayed we can use evidence from the text. Introduce the mnemonic STEAL as a process for revealing characteristics about a character. Display the word STEAL vertically on the board and explain what each letter stands for:

    - S is for speech – What the character says will tell us a little bit about their personality

    - T is for thoughts – What is revealed through the characters private thoughts and feelings?

    - E is for effects – What is revealed through the character's effect on other people?

    - A is for actions – What does the character do, or how do they behave?

    - L is for looks – What does the character look like?

4. The teacher completes a 'think aloud' to model how to retrieve evidence from a short section of the text using STEAL and what inferences they can make about the character (refer to Appendix 9 - STEAL completed teacher example for completed example). It is important for the teacher to note a single extract may not reveal each element of STEAL, and several extracts may be required to build a more detailed picture of the character.

5. Students could read through the remainder of the text or additional extracts to complete the table. Students then use the information from the table to create an overall description of the character using 2-3 sentences (refer to Appendix 10 - STEAL student example for students to complete).

Appendix 1

Teacher guide: Character traits

benevolent	attractive	challenging
compassionate	Short-sighted	empathetic
conciliatory	hesitant	enthusiastic
villainous	sneaky	indecisive
idealistic	heroic	fearful
curious	magnanimous	open
scientifically-minded	organised	ingenious
judicious	astute	unfair
reactive	prudent	inexperienced
manipulative	shy	intelligent

Appendix 2

Scenario cards for character hot seat

Found a lottery ticket	Is being followed by a cat named Poppy
Lost their favourite pair of pants	Is convinced they are being tracked
Bought a new car – it is a lemon	Bringing in the washing in torrential rain
The television stopped working	The microwave exploded mid-dinner
Discovered a new arch enemy	Found a broken mirror
Discovered a new species of slug	There is an alien living in their ear
Discovered a cure for itching	Found a set of false teeth in the garden

Appendix 3

Student scaffold: wizard character comparison

| Gandalf *The Hobbit (J.R.R.Tolkien)*	Dumbledore *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (J.K.Rowling)*
By some curious chance one morning long ago in the quiet of the world, when there was less noise and more green, and the hobbits were still numerous and prosperous, and Bilbo Baggins was standing at his door after breakfast smoking an enormous long wooden pipe that reached nearly down to his woolly toes (neatly brushed) - Gandalf came by. Gandalf! If you had heard only a quarter of what I have heard about him, and I have only heard very little of all there is to hear, you would be prepared for any sort of remarkable tale. Tales and adventures sprouted up all over the place wherever he went, in the most extraordinary fashion. He had not been down that way under The Hill for ages and ages, not since his friend the Old Took died, in fact, and the hobbits had almost forgotten what he looked like. He had been away over The Hill and across The Water on business of his own since they were all small hobbit-boys and hobbit-girls. All that the unsuspecting Bilbo saw that morning was an old man with a staff. He had a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which a white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots. "Good morning!" said Bilbo, and he meant it. The sun was shining, and the grass was very green. But Gandalf looked at him from under long bushy eyebrows that stuck out further than the brim of his shady hat. "What do you mean?" he said. "Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?"	Nothing like this man had ever been seen in Privet Drive. He was tall, thin and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak which swept the ground and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice. This man's name was Albus Dumbledore. Albus Dumbledore didn't seem to realise that he had just arrived in a street where everything from his name to his boots was unwelcome. He was busy rummaging in his cloak, looking for something. But he did seem to realise he was being watched, because he looked up suddenly at the cat, which was still staring at him from the other end of the street. For some reason, the sight of the cat seemed to amuse him. He chuckled and muttered 'I should have known.'

Appendix 4

Student scaffold: character comparison

How are wizards portrayed in narratives? Justify with evidence from the text. Include page number references.

Physical Appearance	Behaviours
How others view them	**What they might say**
Feelings	**Actions**

Challenge:
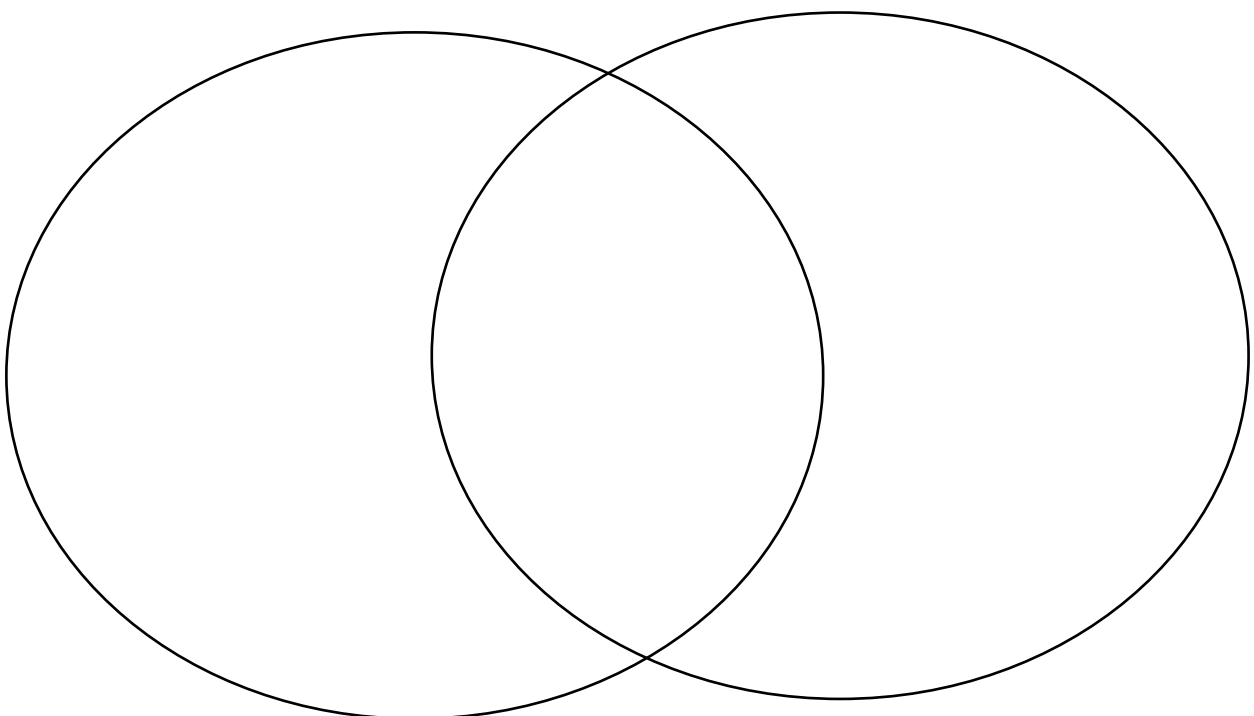
Appendix 5

Student scaffold: Character portrayal

Use evidence from the text including the page number reference to justify your responses:

What does the character look like?	What do they say and do?
What do they think and feel? Attitude?	**How do other characters think and feel about them?**
Conflict, goals and dreams	**Memories – good and bad**
Habits and quirks	**Flaws or shortcomings**

Appendix 6

Student scaffold: pivotal moment and character development

Use evidence from the text to justify responses.

Character in the beginning	PIVOTAL MOMENT **What changes or events occurred?**	Character towards the end

Appendix 7

Understanding the protagonist and antagonist

- What is a protagonist?
- What is an antagonist?

Protagonist	Text	Conflict	Antagonist

Appendix 8

Text extract: Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

J.K. Rowling. Bloomsbury. 1997.

"Fancy seeing you here, Professor McGonagall."

He turned to smile at the tabby, but it had gone. Instead he was smiling at a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square glasses exactly the shape of the markings the cat had had around its eyes. She, too, was wearing a cloak, an emerald one. Her black hair was drawn into a tight bun. She looked distinctly ruffled.

"How did you know it was me?" she asked.

"My dear Professor, I've never seen a cat sit so stiffly."

"You'd be stiff if you'd been sitting on a brick wall all day," said Professor McGonagall.

"All day? When you could have been celebrating? I must have passed a dozen feasts and parties on my way here."

Professor McGonagall sniffed angrily.

"Oh yes, I've celebrating, all right," she said impatiently. "You'd think they'd be a bit more careful, but no —even the Muggles have noticed something's going on. It was on their news." She jerked her head back at the Dursleys' dark living-room window. "I heard it. Flocks of owls…shooting stars…Well, they're not completely stupid. They were bound to notice something. Shooting stars down in Kent — I'll bet that was Dedalus Diggle. He never had much sense."

"You can't blame them," said Dumbledore gently. "We've had precious little to celebrate for eleven years." "I know that," said Professor McGonagall irritably. "But that's no reason to lose our heads. People are being downright careless, out on the streets in broad daylight, not even dressed in Muggle clothes, swapping rumours."

Reading: Stage 4 – Analysing character

Appendix 9

STEAL example

Teacher completes a characterisation table based on an extract or text relevant to a current unit of learning. The teacher models how to select appropriate examples from the text to illustrate their point and overall description.

Acronym	Question prompts	Evidence from the text	What I can infer
S speech	What does the character say? How do they say it? What is their tone? Language?	"I know that," said Professor McGonagall **irritably**. "But that's no reason to lose our heads. People are being downright careless, out on the streets in broad daylight, not even dressed in Muggle clothes, swapping rumours."	- irritable tone reveals her frustration that others are not being careful to conceal their true identities 'downright careless.' - infers that she is scared that this behaviour will attract attention.
T Thoughts	What does the character think? What do we learn from their thoughts? Do the characters thoughts differ from what they say?	She jerked her head back at the Dursleys' dark living-room window. "I heard it. Flocks of owls…shooting stars…Well, they're not completely stupid. They were bound to notice something. Shooting stars down in Kent — I'll bet that was Dedalus Diggle. He never had much sense."	-The celebrations are too elaborate and will attract attention -the muggles aren't smart or particularly observant, but they will notice some strange events if there are enough of them. -Dedalus Diggle lacks common sense and is likely to be responsible for the more elaborate celebrations.
E Effects	Do the character's actions have an effect on others? What impact do they have on other characters? On the story?	"You can't blame them," said Dumbledore gently. "We've had precious little to celebrate for eleven years." "I know that," said Professor McGonagall irritably.	-Dumbledore uses a calm and gentle tone to reassure her, and to encourage her to be more empathetic/tolerant towards others.
A Actions	What does the character do? How do they behave? What can we learn from their actions?	'…sniffed angrily.' "You'd be stiff if you'd been sitting on a brick wall all day," said Professor McGonagall. "All day? When you could have been celebrating? I must have passed a dozen feasts and parties on my way here."	- Patient/determined - she is fiercely protective and ignores her own discomfort - worry/concern overrides any desire to celebrate
L Looks	What does this character look like? What can we learn from how they present themselves to others?	'…rather severe-looking woman…' 'Her black hair was drawn into a tight bun.' 'She looked distinctly ruffled.'	Serious/stern, but also worried and concerned 'ruffled'. Note the cumulative effect of vocabulary ('severe', 'tight') which is used to build characterisation.

Appendix 10

STEAL student example

Students complete a characterisation table based on an extract or text relevant to a current unit of learning. Students select appropriate examples from the text to illustrate their point.

Acronym	Question prompts	Evidence from the text	What I can infer
S speech	What does the character say? How do they say it? What is their tone? Language?		
T Thoughts	What does the character think? What do we learn from their thoughts? Do the character's thoughts differ from what they say?		
E Effects	Do the character's actions have an effect on others? What impact do they have on other characters? On the story?		
A Actions	What does the character do? How do they behave? What can we learn from their actions?		
L Looks	What does this character look like? What can we learn from how they present themselves to others?		

What can we conclude about the character's traits? Create an overall description of the character using 2-3 sentences.