



The story's the thing

Sue Leather

We'll talk about....

- Character description
- Drama
- Dialogue

Page Turners



Cambridge Readers



Learner Literature

Original Stories

Character Description

- ‘She was a woman of few ideas, with immense powers of concentration.’
- ‘Michael Corleone was not just a mafioso, but a family man. A man who walked the knife’s edge to preserve his sanity.’
- ‘Where I was big, elbowy and grating, he was small, graceful and smooth. ...he was lauded for his velvet-black skin. His hair fell down in black curls, and my head was covered with black steel wool. And yet he loved me.’

Character Description

- ‘She was a woman of few ideas, with immense powers of concentration.’ ([The Lumber Room, Saki](#))
- ‘Michael Corleone was not just a mafioso, but a family man. A man who walked the knife’s edge to preserve his sanity.’ ([The Godfather, Mario Puzo](#))
- ‘Where I was big, elbowy and grating, he was small, graceful and smooth. ...he was lauded for his velvet-black skin. His hair fell down in black curls, and my head was covered with black steel wool. And yet he loved me.’ ([I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou](#))

Character Description

Jonty was a slim, nervous guy in his late thirties with a thin moustache and terrible taste in ties. He was wearing a particularly horrible grey one with little pink pigs all over it. I tried to ignore it. It wasn't easy.



Level 5- Upper Intermediate

Character Description

Spiegel and Kreine both turned to see who had spoken. Behind them stood a far younger woman, no more than thirty. She was dressed expensively, in a jacket and straight skirt as black as her long hair. She was very attractive and stood with confidence, as though she knew it.

“I’m Miranda Knapp,” she said.

Level - Upper Intermediate



Character Description

Major Rakov was an attractive man in his forties with a large black moustache. His neat black hair shone. He was a man of great energy, but no imagination. “Man of action. That’s me,” he always said to his men. He liked to tell them that he had never read a book. He was the kind of man that Zelim Malin really valued.

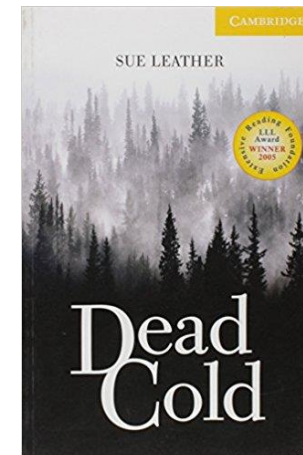
Level 8, Upper Intermediate



Character Description

I looked at Gershon. He was a round person: round body, round face, round glasses. About fifty, fifty-five maybe, with almost no hair. Then I looked around at his office. Yeah, I thought, parking tickets, not murder.

Level 2- Elementary



Task

What are the *characteristics* of a good character description?

A good character description....

- Short
- Focuses on one or two main characteristics
- Maybe exaggerates for effect
- Combines physical attributes and personality
- How does the character make the protagonist *feel*?
- Aims for the *telling* characteristic

Writing Task

- Write a short character description of someone you know, using the guidelines:
- Short
- Focuses on one or two main characteristics
- Maybe exaggerates for effect
- Combines physical attributes and personality
- How does the character make the protagonist *feel*?
- Aims for the *telling* characteristic

Activities : character descriptions

- Noticing descriptions- which one do you like best? etc. (all levels)
- Noting the characteristics of a good description (elementary to advanced)
- Comparing a description in an original reader to one from 'literature' (intermediate- advanced)
- Writing a description of your own character (elementary to advanced)

Drama

- No conflict, no drama
- Without conflict, there is no story
- What stops the protagonist from getting what he/she wants
- Conflict can be external or internal
- External- e.g. Great Expectations
- Internal- e.g. Macbeth
- High stakes e.g. love, fulfilment, power
- Implies choice
- Some suffering

In other words.....



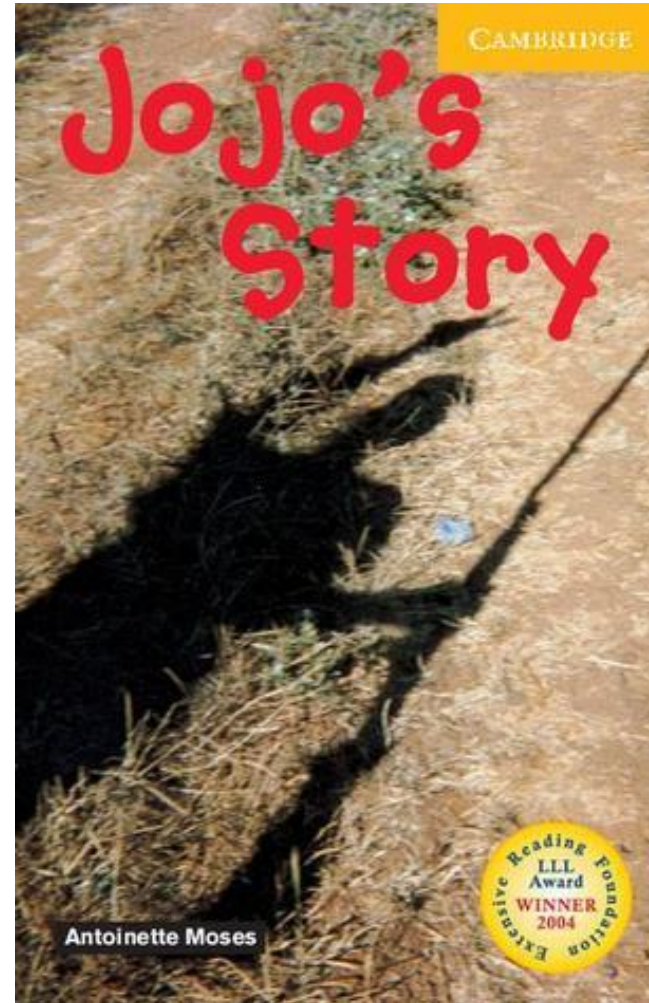
‘Stories are life
with the dull parts
taken out.’

Drama

- 1. A previously powerful, elderly king retires from office. He goes to live with his eldest daughter and her husband, and lives out his days playing with his grandchildren.*
- 2. A previously powerful, elderly king retires from office. He trusts two of his three daughters, because they sound convincing. The daughters strip him of all his authority and degrade him.*

Drama

The story of a young boy's struggle to survive the impact of a war in which he has lost everything he knew.



Drama

The story of a man who wants to be successful on the New York Stock Exchange. He wants it so much that he makes a pact with the devil.



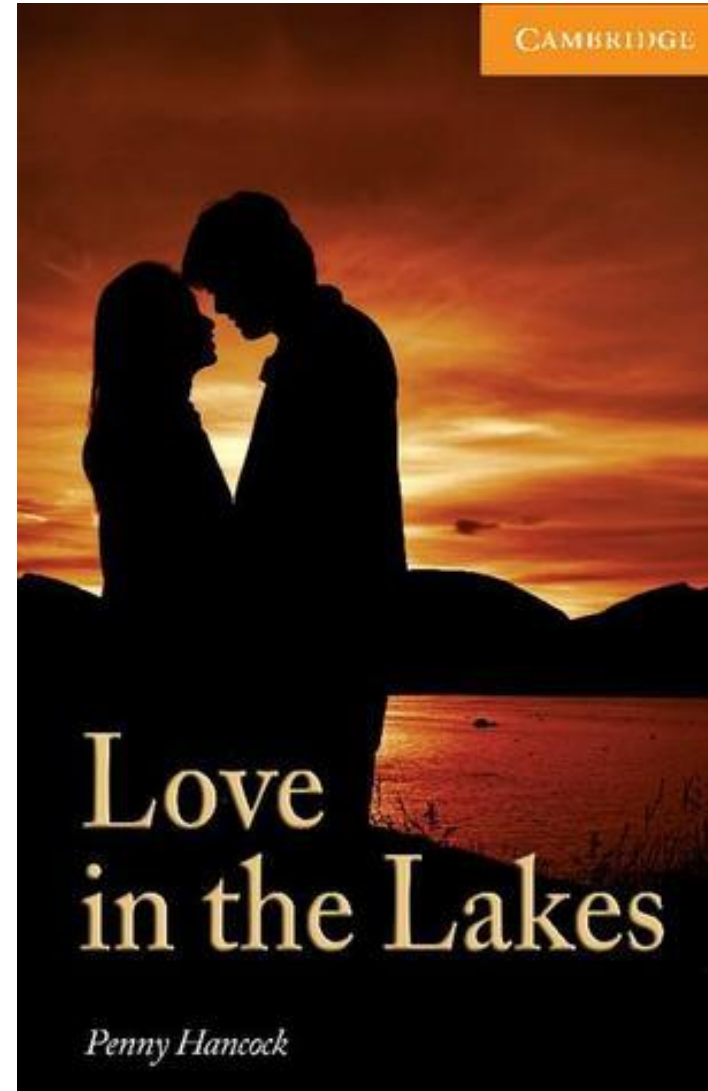
Drama

With her country in the grip of a totalitarian regime, a young sculptor realizes that she has to fight to save more than just her own work.



Drama

Laura thinks she is happy with her boyfriend, Nick. But when they leave the city to go to the countryside for a holiday, Laura meets Robert, who is very different from Nick. This meeting starts to make her ask what she really wants. What choice Laura will make?



While reading, discuss.....

When is the conflict in the story introduced ?

How do we feel when the character is dealing with the conflict?

Is the conflict mainly internal or external?

What are the stakes for the main character?

How does the main character deal with the conflict?

After reading....

- Discuss in groups the choice the protagonist made e.g. Did she/he make the right choice in your opinion? (all levels)
- Students write the premise of the story. Premises are shared and commented on. (Intermediate-Advanced)

Dialogue

'I try to leave out the parts that people skip.'

(Thick paragraphs of prose)... 'What the writer is doing, he's writing, perpetrating hoopte-doodle, perhaps taking another shot at the weather, or has gone into the characters head, and the reader either knows what the guy's thinking or doesn't care. I'll bet you don't skip dialogue.'



Dialogue

- Has a purpose
- Brings us to a scene and makes us experience it in a vivid way
- Sounds real but it isn't
- Advances the story and develops character
- Breaks up the narrative

Is it dialogue or just a conversation?

'Hi Paul'

'Hi Gill'

'What are you doing?'

'I'm listening to a lecture on popular culture on my ipod.'

'Ooh, that sounds interesting. Can I listen too?'

'Sure, give me a minute, and I'll let you have my headphones.'

'Ooh, thanks, Paul.'

'No problem.'

Dialogue

- What's the purpose of this scene?
- What do we learn?
- How does the dialogue here move forward the plot?
- How does it develop the characters?

BAD BLOOD



SUE LEATHER



Dialogue

- What's the purpose of this scene?
- What do we learn?
- How does the dialogue here move forward the plot?
- How does it develop the characters?

Activities: Dialogue

- Discuss purpose of scene, plot & character development (elementary to advanced)
- Look at style e.g. dialogue tags (intermediate to advanced)
- Read dialogue and act out in groups, paying attention to what is said, and what isn't (intermediate to advanced.)
- Write a piece of dialogue (elementary to advanced)

We talked about...

- Character description
- Drama
- Dialogue

Biblio

- *Page Turners Reading Library*, National Geographic Learning Series
Editors: Rob Waring, Sue Leather
- *Cambridge English Readers*, Cambridge University Press Series
Editor: Philip Prowse
- *How to Write Graded Readers*, Sue Leather, ELT Teacher 2 Writer
- *Writers on Writing; Easy on the Adverbs, Exclamation Points and Especially Hoopedoodle* Elmore Leonard: , New York Times, July 16, 2001
- *The Art of Fiction: A guide for writers and readers*, Ayn Rand ,Plume (Penguin Books) New York, 2000
- *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, Lajos Egri, BN Publishing, 2007

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