

When we talk about a character, we often describe that character in terms of **character traits**, descriptive adjectives like happy or sad that tell us the specific qualities of the character. They're the same kinds of words that we might use to describe ourselves or others, but we're using them to describe fictional characters in something we've read. Character traits focus on what a character does, thinks or feels throughout a story.

The author may tell us these traits directly, but more often the author will show us these traits in action. For example, this may include a character's reaction to a situation within the story or other character's descriptions of the character. Our job as readers is to draw a conclusion about the character's traits (*to infer them*) from what the character says, thinks, and does. We might infer a character trait from something a character does only once, or we might draw our conclusions from a series of things the character says and does.

An easy way to think about characters is to use a simple chart like the one below. You can start anywhere. There's no wrong way to make your list:

- jot down actions that the character takes then match them with descriptive adjectives in the character traits column.
- list character traits that match your character; then gather a list of actions from the book that support the traits you've listed
- jump back and forth between the columns listing ideas as they come to you; then go back to fill in the matching information for the related column.

When writing your own material it is important to brainstorm character traits in advance to keep your character's actions **consistent** throughout the story. Also, character traits add depth and interest to a short story.

The similarities and differences of two characters can also be shown using **Venn Diagrams**. This could be useful for showing the relationship between characters.

