Mastering Character Description

Learning objective: To identify and analyse how authors use descriptive language to build character, including the use of show, don't tell.

Read the passage below carefully and answer the questions. Use evidence from the text to support your answers where required.

Max the monkey sat perched upon the highest branch of the ancient oak tree, his brow furrowed in deep concentration. While the other animals played, Max was busy counting the exact number of acorns scattered across the forest floor. He adjusted his spectacles, which were perpetually sliding down his nose, and scribbled a complex equation into his worn leather notebook. His tail flicked with rhythmic precision, ticking like a clock as he calculated the probability of a squirrel migration. Though his coat was slightly messy from his frantic research, his eyes sparkled with the sharp, electric energy of someone who had just discovered a hidden pattern. He did not simply observe the world; he dismantled it into numbers and shapes, searching for the logic hidden beneath the leaves. To Max, a forest was not just trees and sunlight—it was a giant, living maths puzzle waiting for him to find the solution. He tapped his pencil against his chin, a small smile playing on his lips as the final digit clicked perfectly into place.

Word bank: metaphor · personification · vivid · personality · trait · adjective · atmosphere

1. Identify two physical details mentioned in the text that describe Max's appearance. (2 marks)

2. What is Max doing while the other animals are playing in the forest? (2 marks)

3. How does the author suggest that Max is intelligent and focused, without stating it directly? (3 marks)

4. Explain why the author compares Max’s tail to a clock. What does this tell us about his personality? (3 marks)

5. Do you think Max would be a good person to have on your team during a maths competition? Explain why using evidence from the text. (3 marks)

Draw: Draw Max sitting in his tree, showing him with his notebook, his spectacles, and the forest environment he is studying.

Extension challenge: Write a short paragraph (50-75 words) describing a new character using the 'show, don't tell' technique. For example, instead of saying a character is 'brave', describe them walking calmly into a dark, mysterious cave.