Grade 5 ELA: Mastering Character Description

Learning objective: To understand and apply advanced techniques for writing effective character descriptions, including show-don't-tell, expanded noun phrases, and figurative language.

Read the front of each card to test your knowledge of descriptive writing techniques. Flip the card to check your answer and see an example featuring our BookFlik friends.

What does the technique 'Show, don't tell' mean?

Instead of stating a character's emotion directly (e.g., 'Max was nervous'), you describe their actions or physical reactions (e.g., 'Max tapped his foot rhythmically and avoided eye contact as he crunched the numbers').

What is an expanded noun phrase?

A phrase that adds detail to a noun using adjectives or prepositional phrases, for example: 'The wise, golden-eyed owl with feathers as soft as velvet.' (Nova)

Define a simile and give an example.

A comparison between two things using 'like' or 'as'. Example: 'Pip the caterpillar moved as slowly as a drifting fall leaf.'

What is a metaphor?

A direct comparison where you say one thing is another, for example: 'Ellie's memory was a vast, unending library of ancient tales.'

How can you describe a character using personification?

By giving human qualities to non-human objects or abstract ideas. Example: 'The cold wind whispered secrets to Leo as he walked through the forest.'

What are 'character traits' versus 'physical appearance'?

Traits are internal personality characteristics (e.g., brave, curious, patient), while physical appearance describes how they look (e.g., tall, spotted, wearing spectacles).

What is an adverbial of manner?

A word or phrase that describes how an action is performed. Example: 'Kit the fox quickly solved the puzzle, his tail twitching excitedly.'

Why do writers use sensory language in character descriptions?

To help the reader imagine the character using the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) to create a more immersive experience.

What is the purpose of a 'backstory' in a description?

To provide context about a character's past experiences, which helps the reader understand why the character behaves the way they do today.

True or False: A character description should only focus on what someone looks like.

False. A strong character description balances physical appearance with internal personality, motivations, and unique habits.