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AP ENGLISH LITERATURE · FREE RESOURCE

Character (CHR) — Skills 1.A–1.E

A complete study guide to the Character big idea in AP English Literature and Composition. Read it straight through once, then return to the worked readings and practice sets as you prepare for multiple-choice passages and the three free-response essays. Keys for all practice items are in the Answer Key at the end.

Why Character Matters on This Exam

Character questions make up 16–20% of the multiple-choice section, roughly 9–11 of the 55 questions. On the free-response section, the stakes are even higher: the Prose Fiction Analysis prompt (Question 2) almost always asks about “the complex portrayal of [a character]” or “a character’s complex experience,” and the Literary Argument prompt (Question 3) asks you to interpret a character’s choice, secret, memory, or relationship. The College Board Course and Exam Description (CED) lists Character as the first of six big ideas, and it is the one you will use most on exam day.

The Enduring Understanding

CHR-1 (official, paraphrased): Characters in literature allow readers to study and explore a range of values, beliefs, assumptions, biases, and cultural norms represented by those characters.

In plain English: A character is not a person; a character is a *made thing* that an author builds out of details so that readers can watch a set of values in action. When you analyze a character, you are not asking “Is this person nice?” You are asking “What does this author want me to see, question, or feel by building a person this way?” Every detail you notice about a character — what they wear, how they talk, what they refuse to do — is a deliberate choice that reveals the character’s values and, through them, the author’s larger meaning.

The Five Skills, Translated

SKILL	OFFICIAL WORDING (PARAPHRASED)	PLAIN ENGLISH	UNITS WHERE EMPHASIZED
1.A	Identify and describe what specific textual details reveal about a character, that character's perspective, and that character's motives.	Point to exact words and say what they tell you about who this person is, how they see things, and what they want.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6
1.B	Explain the function of a character changing or remaining unchanged.	When a character changes (or stubbornly does not), explain what that change or stasis <i>does</i> for the meaning of the work.	3, 7, 9
1.C	Explain the function of contrasting characters.	When two characters are set against each other, explain what the contrast highlights.	4, 6
1.D	Describe how textual details reveal nuances and complexities in characters' relationships with one another.	Relationships are rarely simple. Find the details that show tension, mixed feelings, or shifting power between people.	4, 7
1.E	Explain how a character's own choices, actions, and speech reveal complexities in that character, and explain the function of those complexities.	What a character <i>does</i> and <i>says</i> (not what the narrator tells you) shows contradictions. Explain why the author wants those contradictions there.	6, 9

Notice the verbs. Skills 1.A and 1.D ask you to **identify and describe**: these are the skills multiple-choice questions test most often. Skills 1.B, 1.C, and 1.E ask you to **explain the function**: these are the skills your essay commentary must demonstrate. "Function" is the single most important word in the CED. It means: what does this choice *do* for the reader's understanding of the text?

Key Concepts and Definitions

Characterization

Characterization is the set of techniques an author uses to build a character. There are two broad kinds.

TYPE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Direct characterization	The narrator tells you a trait outright.	Austen's narrator: Mrs. Bennet "was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper."
Indirect characterization	You infer the trait from what the character does, says, thinks, looks like, or how others react.	Mr. Bennet answering his wife's gossip with "You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it" — we infer his dry, teasing detachment.

A useful memory device is **STEAL**: Speech, Thoughts, Effect on others, Actions, Looks. On the exam, the richest questions come from indirect characterization, because they require inference.

Perspective and Motive

A character's **perspective** is how the character sees the world: their assumptions, blind spots, and values. A character's **motive** is what drives a specific action. These are different things. Perspective is the lens; motive is the push. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet's perspective is that marriage is the only secure future for a woman; her motive in the first chapter is to get her husband to visit the new neighbor.

Dynamic and Static Characters

TERM	DEFINITION	WHY IT MATTERS
Dynamic character	Changes in some meaningful way (values, understanding, relationships) over the course of the text.	The change usually carries the work's meaning; ask what <i>caused</i> the change and what it <i>costs</i> .
Static character	Remains essentially the same.	Stasis is also a choice. A character who refuses to change can expose a rigid value system or serve as a fixed point against which others move.
Round character	Complex, with many traits, some in tension.	Rewards close reading; often the subject of Q2.
Flat character	Built around one or two traits.	Often functions as a type, a foil, or a vehicle for satire.

Do not confuse "dynamic" with "good" or "static" with "bad writing." Mr. Bennet never changes; that is the point.

Foil

A **foil** is a character whose traits contrast with another character's in order to highlight them. Foils do not have to be enemies. Siblings, friends, and spouses are often foils. The 2008 Literary Argument prompt asked specifically about a minor character serving as a foil. When you see two characters placed side by side, ask: what quality in one becomes visible only because of the other?

Complexity

The CED uses the word **complexity** constantly. A complex character holds contradictory traits, motives, or feelings at the same time: pride and insecurity, love and resentment, courage and self-deception. The free-response prompts since 2019 all use the word “complex,” and the sophistication point on the rubric is most often earned by exploring a tension *within* a character rather than by summarizing a character’s traits.

Other Terms You Should Know

- **Protagonist / antagonist** — the central character / the character or force that opposes them. The antagonist is not always a villain.
- **Confidant(e)** — a character to whom the protagonist reveals inner thoughts (the subject of the 1992 open prompt).
- **Stock character / stereotype** — a conventional type (the miser, the braggart). Authors use them to satirize or to subvert expectations.
- **Antihero** — a protagonist lacking conventional heroic qualities.
- **Tragic hero, hamartia** (the error or flaw), **hubris** (excessive pride), **anagnorisis** (the moment of recognition) — terms from Greek tragedy that still frame drama questions.
- **Epiphany** — a sudden realization that changes a character’s understanding.

Worked Close Reading 1: Textual Details and Motive (Skill 1.A)

The opening chapter of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813, public domain) is a masterclass in characterization through dialogue. Here is the opening of the Bennets’ conversation:

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” said his lady to him one day, “have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?”

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

“But it is,” returned she; “for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it.”

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

“Do not you want to know who has taken it?” cried his wife impatiently.

“You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.”

This was invitation enough.

And the chapter’s final paragraph, where the narrator steps in:

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.

Step 1 — Notice the details. Mrs. Bennet opens with “My dear,” a term of affection, but her next move is to report gossip. Mr. Bennet’s first two responses are reported indirectly (“replied that he had not”; “made no answer”), which makes him seem barely present. His one direct line, “You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it,” is a sentence that grants permission without expressing interest.

Step 2 — Ask what each detail reveals. The adverb “impatiently” and the verb “cried” give Mrs. Bennet’s motive: she needs an audience. Mr. Bennet’s line reveals a perspective: he treats his wife’s excitement as a performance he will tolerate. The phrase “This was invitation enough” is the narrator’s dry joke: Mrs. Bennet needs almost no encouragement.

Step 3 — Weigh the direct characterization. The final paragraph confirms what the dialogue implied, but notice the asymmetry. Mr. Bennet gets four nouns that do not fully agree with each other (“quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice”), and the narrator says even his wife cannot fully “understand his character.” Mrs. Bennet gets three blunt phrases that do agree (“mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper”), and the narrator says her mind “was less difficult to develop.” The *grammar* of the characterization tells you who is complex and who is flat.

Step 4 — State the function. Austen builds the Bennets as a mismatched pair so that the reader will see, from the first page, the marriage market the novel examines: a woman whose whole “business” is marrying off daughters, and a husband who has retreated into irony rather than engage. Their contrasting speech habits (her exclamations, his understatement) establish both the comic tone and the social critique.

What this looks like in a sentence of commentary: Austen’s decision to report Mr. Bennet’s first two responses indirectly, while giving Mrs. Bennet’s every word, enacts the imbalance in their marriage: she fills the room with talk, and he withholds himself, so that his single direct line, granting that he has “no objection to hearing it,” reads as a small act of condescension rather than affection.

Worked Close Reading 2: A Character Who Changes (Skill 1.B)

Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” (1894, public domain) tracks a woman, Louise Mallard, in the hour after she learns her husband has died in a railroad accident. The story is famous for a change that takes place almost entirely inside her. Here are three moments from the story.

Early, as she sits alone at an upstairs window:

She said it over and over under her breath: “free, free, free!”

A little later:

And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

And after she comes downstairs and her husband, who was not on the train after all, walks in the door:

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of the joy that kills.

Tracking the change. Louise moves from grief (described earlier in the story as a “storm of grief”) to a whispered discovery (“free, free, free!”) to an open declaration that self-possession matters more to her than love. The repetition of “free” three times, “under her breath,” shows the thought arriving before she dares to say it aloud. The dashes and the admission “sometimes. Often she had not” show her revising her own history in real time.

The function of the change. Chopin uses Louise’s transformation to make an argument about marriage as an institution. Note that Louise does not blame her husband; the story has already said he was kind. Her joy is not about escaping *him* but about escaping the condition of being owned. The change reveals a value system that the story’s society cannot see or name.

The function of the ending. The doctors’ diagnosis, “the joy that kills,” is **dramatic irony**: the reader knows the “joy” was freedom, not reunion. The ending works only because the reader has watched the change the other characters never saw. Chopin makes the gap between Louise’s inner change and the world’s reading of her the whole point.

A model of Skill 1.B commentary: Louise’s hour-long transformation from a woman who weeps “with sudden, wild abandonment” to one who whispers “free, free, free!” functions as the story’s argument: her grief was real, but so was the self she had never been permitted to assert, and the story’s final irony depends on a world that can only interpret her collapse as wifely devotion.

Worked Close Reading 3: Contrast, Relationship, and Speech (Skills 1.C, 1.D, 1.E)

The following excerpt is **original**, written for this guide in the manner of a late-nineteenth-century novel. It is here so that you can see Skills 1.C, 1.D, and 1.E working together in a passage you have never read before, which is exactly the condition of the exam.

Margaret arranged the cups so that each handle pointed the same way, then stepped back to judge the effect. Her sister Clara, who had been reading on the window seat with her boots on the cushion, did not look up.

“You might help,” Margaret said.

“I might,” said Clara, turning a page. “But then there would be two of us doing a thing that needs none.”

“Mother will notice if the table is wrong.”

“Mother will notice if the table is right. She will simply notice it less.” Clara closed the book on her finger and, for the first time, looked at her sister. “Meg. Sit down. He is not coming before four, and the cups will not run away.”

Margaret sat, though on the very edge of the chair, as if the furniture belonged to someone else. “You think I am ridiculous.”

“I think you are careful,” Clara said. “I have never once in my life been careful, and look where it has got me.” She gestured at the window seat, the book, the boots, the whole lazy afternoon, and laughed. But Margaret, who knew her sister, heard the thing underneath the laugh, and did not laugh with her.

Skill 1.C — the contrast. The sisters are built as opposites in almost every detail: Margaret stands and arranges; Clara reclines and reads. Margaret worries about their mother's judgment; Clara dismisses it with wit. The contrast highlights a question the passage is really about: what has each sister's way of living cost her?

Skill 1.D — the relationship. The relationship is not simply "the careful sister versus the careless one." Clara's "Meg. Sit down" is tender; she uses a nickname and gives an order that is really an act of care. Margaret's question "You think I am ridiculous" shows that she values Clara's opinion more than she lets on. The last sentence, in which Margaret "heard the thing underneath the laugh," reveals intimacy: she can read her sister better than her sister wants to be read. The relationship holds affection, judgment, and protection at once.

Skill 1.E — speech revealing complexity. Clara's line "I have never once in my life been careful, and look where it has got me" is the key moment. On the surface it is a joke at her own expense, delivered with a laugh and a gesture at her comfortable idleness. But the sentence admits regret. Clara's own speech reveals a complexity: she performs contentment while acknowledging loss. The function of that complexity is to prevent the reader from taking sides. The passage refuses to let Margaret's carefulness be simply timid or Clara's freedom be simply enviable.

How a strong essay would use this passage: Rather than writing one paragraph about Margaret and one about Clara (a device-by-device or character-by-character structure), a strong essay would organize around the *relationship's* complexity: first the surface contrast, then the tenderness that complicates it, then the regret in Clara's final speech that reverses who seems to be the stronger sister.

How Character Shows Up on the Multiple-Choice Section

Character questions on the current exam have four answer choices (A–D), as all questions have since the May 2025 administration. They typically take one of these forms:

- "In lines X–Y, the narrator characterizes [character] as..."
- "[Character]'s remark in line X reveals that [he/she]..."
- "Which of the following best describes the relationship between X and Y?"
- "The contrast between X and Y serves primarily to..."
- "[Character]'s response to [event] suggests that..."
- "The speaker's attitude toward [subject] is best described as..."

Wrong answers in character questions tend to fall into predictable traps: they **overreach** (the text supports "skeptical," the distractor says "contemptuous"), they are **half right** (one adjective fits, the other does not), they attribute a feeling to the **wrong character**, or they state something **true in general but not supported by the cited lines**. The correct answer is almost always the most measured option that is anchored in specific words.

Sample Questions (based on the Austen excerpt above)

1. Mr. Bennet's statement "You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it" primarily characterizes him as

- A. eager to learn about the new neighbor but unwilling to appear so
- B. detached and dryly amused by his wife's enthusiasm
- C. resentful of his wife's constant visits to Mrs. Long
- D. anxious to end the conversation before his daughters overhear

Key: B. The sentence grants permission without interest; combined with his earlier silence, it shows detachment and dry humor. (A) overreaches by inventing hidden eagerness. (C) invents a motive the text does not support. (D) imports characters not present in the lines.

2. The narrator's description of Mr. Bennet as "so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice" serves primarily to

- A. suggest that his character is more complex than his wife's
- B. explain why he has been unable to find husbands for his daughters
- C. criticize his failure to take his wife's concerns seriously
- D. indicate that he is unpredictable and therefore untrustworthy

Key: A. The sentence's catalog of partly conflicting traits, followed by the statement that his wife still cannot "understand his character," establishes complexity, especially when set against the simpler description of Mrs. Bennet. (B) is not in the passage. (C) overreads the tone as criticism. (D) overreaches from "caprice" to "untrustworthy."

3. The phrase "This was invitation enough" most directly reveals that Mrs. Bennet

- A. has been waiting for her husband to show genuine interest
- B. is easily offended by her husband's indifference
- C. requires very little encouragement to share news
- D. is unaware that her husband is mocking her

Key: C. The narrator's understatement points at Mrs. Bennet's readiness to talk. (A) is contradicted; he showed no genuine interest. (B) misreads her response. (D) is plausible in the novel as a whole but is not what *this phrase* reveals; the question asks what the phrase "most directly" shows. This is the "right idea, wrong lines" trap.

4. The contrast between Mrs. Bennet's speech and Mr. Bennet's speech in the excerpt functions primarily to

- A. establish that the couple is on the verge of separation
- B. demonstrate that Mrs. Bennet is better informed about the neighborhood
- C. emphasize the imbalance in energy and engagement within the marriage
- D. foreshadow a conflict between Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Long

Key: C. Her exclamations and questions against his silence and understatement dramatize the imbalance. (A) is extreme. (B) is literally true but trivial and not the *function*. (D) invents a conflict.

How Character Shows Up on the Free-Response Section

Question 2 (Prose Fiction Analysis)

The stable wording: "Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how [author] uses literary elements and techniques to portray the complex [character / relationship / experience]." Since 2019, the Chief Reader Reports have repeatedly noted that students lose points by tunnel vision on the main character while ignoring secondary characters and the narrator's stance. In 2025, for example, readers noted that students writing about Thomas Bradshaw "relied on details about Thomas and ignored Olga and Tonie".

A model thesis (for a Q2 prompt on the Austen excerpt asking about the complex portrayal of the Bennets' marriage):

Austen portrays the Bennets' marriage not as a battle but as a long-standing performance in which each partner plays a fixed role: Mrs. Bennet supplies the energy and the anxiety, Mr. Bennet supplies the irony and the distance, and the narrator's unequal treatment of the two reveals that his detachment, though more attractive than her fretting, is its own kind of failure.

Why this thesis works: it answers the prompt (the marriage is complex), it names a tension ("not a battle but a performance"), it previews a line of reasoning (her role, his role, the narrator's judgment), and it ends with an interpretive claim about meaning ("its own kind of failure") rather than a list of devices.

A model body paragraph:

Austen builds Mr. Bennet's detachment through what he does *not* say. His first two responses are reported rather than quoted: he "replied that he had not" and "made no answer." The indirect reporting makes him a muted presence in his own drawing room, while his wife's words arrive in full, with exclamation points and the adverb "impatiently." When Mr. Bennet finally speaks, the sentence is a model of withheld engagement: "You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it." He does not ask; he permits. The verb "object" turns a conversation between spouses into a transaction between a petitioner and an official, and the comic effect depends on the reader hearing how little he is giving. Yet Austen does not let the reader simply side with him. The narrator's catalog of his "quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice" is admiring in its first two terms and cooler in its last two; "caprice" in particular hints that his irony is not wisdom but whim. The marriage is complex because the partner who seems to see more clearly has chosen to use that clarity as a shield.

Notice the structure: claim, short embedded quotations, commentary on *how* the language works (indirect reporting, the verb "object"), and a turn ("Yet") that returns to the complexity in the thesis.

Question 3 (Literary Argument)

Many Q3 prompts are character prompts in disguise: a character's secret (2025), a character affected by a memory (2025), a character who delays a decision (2024), a character who reinvents an identity (2023). The skill you need is 1.B and 1.E: explain what the character's change or choice *does* for the meaning of the work as a whole.

A model Q3 thesis (2024 Set 1 prompt on a character who delays or resists a decision; text: *Jane Eyre*):

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's long refusal to choose between Rochester's offer and St. John's demand is not weakness but the novel's central act of self-preservation: by delaying, she refuses both a love that would make her a possession and a duty that would make her an instrument, and Brontë uses that resistance to argue that a woman's integrity depends on choosing on her own terms.

Question 1 (Poetry Analysis)

Poems have speakers rather than characters, and the Narration guide covers speakers in depth. But many poems *present* a character (a juggler, a landlady, a father), and prompts such as 2019's "complex portrayal of the landlady" are character prompts. Use the same moves: specific details, revealed perspective, contradiction, function.

Practice Exercises

Answers are in the Answer Key at the end of this document.

Exercise 1 (Skill 1.A). Reread the Austen excerpt. List three specific textual details (quote them) and, for each, write one sentence stating what the detail reveals about the character's perspective or motive.

Exercise 2 (Skill 1.A). In the original sisters passage, Margaret sits "on the very edge of the chair, as if the furniture belonged to someone else." What does this detail reveal about Margaret? Write two sentences: one on the literal action, one on the inference.

Exercise 3 (Skill 1.B). In "The Story of an Hour," Chopin writes that Louise "had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not." Explain in 3–4 sentences how this admission functions in the story's portrayal of Louise's change. What would be lost if Chopin had made Louise simply hate her husband?

Exercise 4 (Skill 1.C). Identify a pair of foils from any work you have read this year. In one paragraph, name the quality in each that the contrast makes visible, and state what the author gains by the contrast.

Exercise 5 (Skill 1.D). In the sisters passage, identify two details that complicate a simple reading of the sisters' relationship as "the responsible one versus the lazy one." Explain each in one or two sentences.

Exercise 6 (Skill 1.E). Clara says, "I have never once in my life been careful, and look where it has got me." Write a 5–7 sentence commentary paragraph explaining how this speech reveals a complexity in Clara and what function that complexity serves in the passage.

Exercise 7 (MCQ writing). Write one multiple-choice question about Mrs. Bennet with four options, where the key is the most measured text-anchored option and the three distractors use these three error types: overreach, wrong character, and half-right. Label each distractor's error type.

Exercise 8 (Thesis repair). Here is a weak thesis for a Q2 prompt on the sisters passage: "The author uses dialogue and characterization to show that the two sisters are very different and have a complex relationship." Rewrite it so that it (a) names the actual complexity, (b) uses an "although/yet" or "not simply/but" structure, and (c) ends with a claim about meaning.

Common Misconceptions

"Character analysis means listing personality traits." Listing traits is description, which earns at most 1 point in Row B of the rubric. Analysis explains what the traits *do*: how they create tension, reveal values, or shape the reader's judgment. Always push from "Mr. Bennet is sarcastic" to "Mr. Bennet's sarcasm functions as..."

"Static characters are less important than dynamic ones." Static characters often anchor a work's critique. Mr. Bennet's refusal to change is the condition that forces his daughters to act. On the exam, "remaining unchanged" is explicitly named in Skill 1.B.

“The narrator’s description is the truth about the character.” Sometimes. But narrators have attitudes, and a narrator’s judgment can be ironic, biased, or limited. Weigh direct characterization against what the character actually does and says. When they disagree, you have found the complexity the prompt is asking for.

“The main character is the only one who matters.” Chief Reader Reports for 2024 and 2025 both identify tunnel vision on the protagonist as a major reason essays stall at 2 points in Row B. Secondary characters, foils, and even characters who only appear in another character’s speech reveal the protagonist.

“Complex means confusing.” Complex means holding two true things at once. “Clara is both contented and regretful” is complex. “Clara’s feelings are hard to pin down” is a dodge.

“A character’s speech always means what it says.” Clara’s joke at her own expense is also a confession. Mr. Bennet’s permission is also a dismissal. Reading speech for what it reveals *despite* its surface is Skill 1.E in action.

“I should choose a Q3 text where the character obviously changes.” Choose a text you know in detail. A character who resists change (Bartleby, Mr. Bennet, Nora before her final act) can produce a stronger argument than a conventional growth story, because the resistance invites the question “why?”

Quick Reference: Analytical Verbs for Character

Use these in theses and topic sentences instead of “shows” or “uses”: *characterizes, dramatizes, exposes, undercuts, complicates, juxtaposes, withholds, reveals, performs, masks, resists, concedes, mirrors, inverts, isolates.*

Answer Key

Exercise 1 (sample answers; any three well-anchored details earn credit). – “My dear Mr. Bennet” followed immediately by gossip: Mrs. Bennet’s affection is habitual and functional; her motive is to secure an audience. – “cried his wife impatiently”: the verb and adverb reveal that she experiences her husband’s silence as an obstacle; her perspective is that news must be shared to matter. – “Mr. Bennet made no answer”: the withheld reply reveals his perspective that his wife’s excitement does not require engagement. – “You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it”: reveals a motive to tease and a perspective that treats conversation as something he permits rather than joins. – “its solace was visiting and news”: reveals that for Mrs. Bennet, social activity compensates for a life whose only “business” is marrying off daughters.

Exercise 2. Literal: Margaret sits but only on the chair’s edge, ready to stand again. Inference: she does not feel entitled to rest or to occupy space in her own home; the simile “as if the furniture belonged to someone else” reveals a perspective in which comfort is for others and vigilance is her role.

Exercise 3. The admission makes Louise’s change credible and morally complicated. If she had simply hated her husband, her joy at his death would be ordinary and the story would be about a bad marriage. Because she loved him “sometimes,” her relief cannot be explained by his character; it must be explained by the condition of marriage itself, which is Chopin’s actual subject. The sentence functions to shift the story’s critique from an individual to an institution, and it keeps Louise sympathetic even as she rejoices, which is what makes the ending’s irony painful rather than merely clever.

Exercise 4. Open response. Full credit requires: (1) two specific characters, (2) one quality in each that the contrast highlights (not just “they are different”), and (3) a statement of function (what the author gains: emphasis, judgment, a question the work raises). Example: In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Bennet’s determination to think well of everyone makes visible Elizabeth’s quickness to judge; Austen gains a way to show that Elizabeth’s wit, which the reader enjoys, is also a form of the prejudice the title names.

Exercise 5 (sample). (1) “Meg. Sit down.” The nickname and the imperative show care disguised as command; Clara, the “lazy” sister, is the one looking after Margaret. (2) “Margaret, who knew her sister, heard the thing underneath the laugh”: Margaret’s attentiveness is not just anxiety about teacups; she is the one who understands Clara’s hidden regret, which makes her the perceptive sister, not merely the fussy one. Also acceptable: Margaret’s “You think I am ridiculous,” which shows she values Clara’s judgment despite their differences.

Exercise 6 (model paragraph). Clara’s remark “I have never once in my life been careful, and look where it has got me” reveals that her idleness is a performance she half believes in. The sentence is framed as a joke: she gestures at “the whole lazy afternoon” and laughs, inviting Margaret to see her comfort as the reward for not caring. But the phrase “look where it has got me” is the language of regret, not triumph, and the laugh arrives after it, as if to cover it. Clara’s own words therefore reveal a complexity: she is at once proud of her freedom and aware of what it has cost her. The function of this complexity is to deny the reader an easy judgment. Up to this moment the passage has invited us to prefer Clara’s wit to Margaret’s fretting; the confession rebalances the scene, and Margaret’s refusal to laugh with her confirms that the careful sister has heard what the careless one could not quite say.

Exercise 7 (model). Mrs. Bennet’s exclamation “Do not you want to know who has taken it?” primarily reveals that she (A) is frustrated that her husband has already heard the news from Mrs. Long (*wrong character / contradicts text: he has not heard*) (B) is impatient to share information and needs her husband’s participation (KEY) (C) is deeply hurt by her husband’s habitual coldness toward her (*overreach: “deeply hurt” is more extreme than the text supports*) (D) is eager to share news and worried that her husband dislikes Mrs. Long (*half-right: eagerness fits, the worry about Mrs. Long does not*)

Exercise 8 (model). Although the passage first presents Margaret’s carefulness and Clara’s ease as simple opposites, Clara’s tender command and her half-joking confession reveal that each sister envies what the other has sacrificed, suggesting that the passage is less a contrast between two temperaments than a portrait of two women measuring the cost of the lives they have chosen.

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