

LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITY 3

Analyzing “Character” in Literature

Learning the Skill

The manner in which a writer develops the characters in a story is called **characterization**. Authors characterize in several ways. The story may be told by a person who describes each character at length as he or she is introduced. You also learn about characters through their actions and how they get along with other characters. Often, authors give you clues about characters through what they say or think, and by what other characters say about them. As you read a story, think about these questions to analyze character:

- What does the author reveal to readers about the characters?
How does the author do this?
- Do the characters seem true to life?
- How do the characters change during the story?
- Which character do you like the most? Why?

Practicing the Skill

The Book of Daniel, in the Bible, is one of the sacred texts of Hebrew scripture. It contains the stories of a young man who remains faithful to his beliefs in the midst of oppression. Read the following excerpt from Chapter 6 of the Book of Daniel, which takes place during the time of the Jews’ exile in Babylon. As you read, note how Daniel, Darius, and the administrators and princes are characterized.



¹ It pleased [King] Darius to appoint 120 princes to rule throughout the kingdom, ² with three administrators [managers] over them, one of whom was Daniel. The princes were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. ³ Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the princes by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ At this, the administrators and the princes tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent [careless]. ⁵ Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

⁶ So the administrators and the princes went as a group to the king and said: “O King Darius, live forever! ⁷ The royal administrators, prefects, princes, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict [law] and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be

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thrown into the lions’ den. ⁸ Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” ⁹ So King Darius put the decree in writing.

¹⁰ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹² So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions’ den?” The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

¹³ Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” ¹⁴ When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. ¹⁵ Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, “Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”

¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!” ¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. ¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den.

²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished [sorrowful] voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?” ²¹ Daniel answered, “O king, live forever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.”

²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

Sources: Daniel 6:1–23, New International Version; and Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2003.

LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITY 3 (continued)

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Applying the Skill

Directions: Read and answer the following questions.

1. How is Daniel characterized at the beginning of the story?
At the end?

2. How are the administrators and princes characterized? What clues does the author give you to show this characterization?

3. How did King Darius feel about throwing Daniel into the lions’ den? What does this say about Darius’s character?

4. Which character did you like the most? Why?



BIOGRAPHY ACTIVITY 3C

Daniel

According to the Hebrew Bible, Daniel was about 15 when he was kidnapped from his home in Judah and taken 700 miles to the kingdom of Babylonia. The Babylonians wanted Daniel to convert to their religion. They tested Daniel and tempted him in many ways to abandon his belief in God. Daniel refused every temptation.

Handwriting on the Wall

Daniel worked hard and became one of the most powerful people in the kingdom. He interpreted dreams for the king. He even interpreted the “handwriting on the wall”—a message from God warning of the upcoming death of King Belshazzar.

Daniel’s biggest test, though, came under the new ruler, King Darius. The king wanted Daniel to be president of his entire country. Daniel’s enemies knew he would never renounce his belief in God, so they asked Darius to declare that nobody could pray to anyone but the king for thirty days. Violators would be thrown in the lions’ den.

The Lions’ Den

Daniel was about 80 years old at this time, but he ignored the order. Darius



Daniel

tried to find a way not to feed Daniel to the lions, but Daniel did break the king’s law. Reluctantly, Darius had Daniel put in the lions’ den.

Darius returned to the den the next morning, expecting Daniel to be dead. Instead, Daniel was alive. He told the king that God had sent an angel to shut the lions’ mouths. Darius ordered that Daniel be freed. He then had Daniel’s enemies and their families tossed into the lions’ den instead.

Directions: On a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions below.

1. How old was Daniel when he was taken from his home in Judah?
2. What did the “handwriting on the wall” mean?
3. How did Daniel survive the night in the lions’ den?
4. **Writing** Describe how the story of Daniel could offer comfort to Jews during times of exile and persecution.