

# ELEMENTS OF *Literature*

## FIRST COURSE

These are the stories  
that never, never die,  
that are carried like seed  
into a new country,  
are told to you and me  
and make in us  
new and lasting strengths.

—from *Nancy Hanks of Wilderness Road:  
A Story of Lincoln's Mother*  
by Meridel Le Sueur

## Understanding How Character Affects Plot If . . . Then . . .

What would happen in *Star Wars* if Darth Vader suddenly became afraid of Luke Skywalker? How would the cartoon *Scooby Doo* be different if Scooby became brave? What would happen to *The Flintstones* if Fred suddenly got smart?

In each of those situations, the outcome of the plot would certainly change if the characters changed. In other words, if a character acts one way, then the plot proceeds in a certain way. If a character acts in a different way, the outcome of the plot changes also.

Imagine what would have happened in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* if the Grinch had not been mean and stingy. Probably he would never have tried to stop Christmas from coming. Think about what would have happened in "Sleeping Beauty" if the princess hadn't been curious. Most likely she wouldn't have wandered into the one room that had the spinning wheel that was to put her and the whole kingdom to sleep for one hundred years.

### We All Have Traits

To understand how character affects plot, you've first got to be able to identify the main character's qualities. A character's qualities, or traits, can be flaws or strengths. We all have character traits. We may be ambitious, shy, generous, fearless, kind, selfish—the possibilities are almost endless.

You discover the traits of a character you meet in a story the same way you discover the traits of real people. You think about how the character acts, how the character looks, and what he or she says. You think about how other people respond to the character. In fact, you think about all the ways writers develop a character.

### Who Am I?

Here are some adjectives you can use to describe character traits.

Character Traits	
strong/weak	wise/foolish
kind/mean	selfish/unselfish
brave/cowardly	good/bad
honest/dishonest	clever/silly
bold/shy	modern/old-fashioned
	truthful/sneaky
	dependable/unreliable
	generous/stingy

### Techniques for Creating Character

Writer uses  
dialogue to tell  
what the char-  
acter says.

Writer  
tells how the  
character  
acts.

Writer reveals  
the character's  
thoughts and  
feelings.

Writer  
describes the  
character's  
appearance.

Writer shows  
what others  
think about the  
character.