

"You can't be around our Mr Pleasant without liking him, without wanting to fight alongside him."

Skulduggery Pleasant

At a glance

Skulduggery Pleasant abounds with strong, sharply-drawn characters that leap off the page and linger in the mind. This resource invites children to explore character in a multitude of ways, from simple descriptions and illustrations of the Skulduggery crew, to making relationship maps, identifying descriptive techniques and putting them into practice to create Skulduggery-style characters and stories of their own.

Curriculum fit

The activities in Exploring Character can be used to meet the NC requirements in KS2 English to develop an understanding and appreciation of literary texts, including modern fiction by significant children's authors.

And in particular it can help children to:

- * recognise the choice, use and effect of figurative language, vocabulary and the effects of language
- * identify how character is created
- * respond imaginatively, drawing on the whole text.

Learning points

Through these activities, children will:

- * understand how the characters in Skulduggery Pleasant are created through descriptive language, their words and actions, and how they are shown in relation to each other
- * describe the techniques and language that Landy uses
- * put these techniques into practice in developing a character in a piece of creative writing.

Skulduggery Pleasant

Teacher's Resources

Exploring Character

Reading recap

Read or revisit chapters 1-4 to identify the techniques used to establish the two main characters.

For each chapter, as a class or in pairs, make notes on how the characters are revealed by:

- * How they are described; their appearance, history, attitudes and relationships.
- * What they say; their speech.
- * What they do; how they move, the actions they take.
- * What others say about them; how they are seen through the eyes of other characters.

To demonstrate the task you could model this using examples for Skulduggery and Stephanie in chapter 1. E.g.

Chapter	Description	What they Say	What they Do	What Others Say
1	<p>Skulduggery: The 'gentleman in the tan overcoat' is mysterious. He has a scarf round his face, 'wild frizzy hair', a 'wide brimmed hat' & 'gigantic sunglasses'.</p> <p>His voice is 'so smooth it could have been made of velvet'.</p> <p>He has an old-fashioned gold pocket watch.</p>	<p>That his writer fantasies must make him seem odd - which suggests he thinks he's otherwise normal.</p> <p>He knows more about Stephanie than she does about him.</p> <p>He wishes Stephanie luck - not expecting to see her again.</p>	<p>He is unnaturally still.</p> <p>He suddenly appears and disappears without warning.</p>	<p>Stephanie is intrigued by him. So are we.</p> <p>When they speak she does think he is odd - because of the way he looks as much as what he says. Though his conversation is a bit unusual too.</p>

Skulduggery Pleasant

Teacher's Resources

Exploring Character

Chapter	Description	What they Say	What they Do	What Others Say
1	<p>We see the scene through Stephanie's eyes - this makes us 'on her side'.</p> <p>She was imaginative and curious as a little girl so probably still is.</p> <p>She's ignored by her cousins Carol and Crystal and described as their opposite. (They are 'sour and vindictive', 'bottle-blonde', 'stumpy', overweight and badly dressed.)</p> <p>This emphasises the fact that she's tall, slim and dark.</p>	<p>She asks herself, 'Who was he? She didn't even ask his name.'</p>	<p>She leaves the crowd - she might be quite independent.</p>	<p>Her uncle called her 'strong-willed intelligent, sharp-tongued, doesn't suffer fools gladly'.</p>

Discussion points

Which bit of the description in chapters 1-4 do you find most effective in helping you to imagine the character and why? Use examples to support your view.

Do any particular words or phrases stand out to you? If so what are they and why?

Why do you think that Derek Landy builds these characters and their relationship over the first four chapters, rather than telling us how it is from the start?

In the descriptions of Skulduggery, it's interesting to note how we almost learn as much by what Stephanie can't see, than by what she can. E.g.

Visible: 'The scarf was still wrapped, the sunglasses still on, the fuzzy hair still poking out. His hands were gloved.'

Hidden: 'She felt the man smile, though she could see no mouth.'

Landy uses this technique throughout to humanise his supernatural creation, and to give us a sense of his personality and emotions. E.g. 'If Skulduggery had had eyebrows, they would most likely be arched.'

1. Create a character profile

Ask children to draw a picture of a character that interests them from Skulduggery Pleasant. This could be Stephanie, Skulduggery or a character from later in the book, such as China, Meritorious or Tanith, or a relatively minor character like Stephanie's uncle Fergus or Mr Fedgewick. Encourage the class not to all do the same thing and create the range of characters between them.

Ask pupils to add labels to their finished drawing to describe what the character is like. Direct them to use quotes from the book and WOW words to convey their chosen character's essential qualities.

2. Make a Dead Famous display

Mount children's artwork and labels. Use sticky tack or velcro to attach them to the wall so that they can be subsequently moved around as part of different learning activities, or to ensure that your display can evolve with your exploration of the book.

Start your display with your character study work. Add phrases that will help children think about the range of descriptive techniques that are at their disposal, and some of the key words from your analysis.

Use the characters on display to develop children's understanding of the relationship of the characters to each other, by inviting children to move them around, and linking them with a set of lines. On these lines, write things like 'brother of', 'enemy of', 'mentor to' etc.

As your exploration of the book progresses add in key words and phrases and new elements of children's work to the display.

3. Create your own character

Use the techniques that you've identified in *Skulduggery Pleasant* to create a character for Stephanie and Skulduggery to meet in their next adventure. Make up a name, age and describe their appearance, what they do, and what magical powers they have. Create a past for them that explains why they are like they are today.

As part of the introduction to this activity, ask children to work in small groups to brainstorm some rich vocabulary or WOW words that they might like to use to help them to create vivid character descriptions. E.g.

Eyes: hollow, sharp, piercing, misty, deep, limpid, manic, burning, intense, wide, narrow, flickering, startling

Hair: straggling, abundant, frizzy, sleek, wild, sparse, sleek, bubbly, shaggy, neglected, well-groomed

Teeth: snagged, vampiric, rotten, crumbling, gleaming, dazzling, even, pointed, pearly

Colours: chalk-white, eggshell-white, slate-grey, mud-brown, ruby-red, wine-dark, sky-blue, winter-grey

Skin: sallow, rosy, deathly-pale, papery, rough, wrinkled, unblemished, taut, saggy

Mouth: cruel, generous, curling, laughing, gaping, lazy, playful, pensive

Movement: darting, lumbering, swaggering, slouching, sliding, sidling, swift, languid, graceful, waddling, scuttling, bold, decisive, lunging, tentative, effortless

Voice: booming, silky, gentle, rasping, solemn, musical, singsong, lilting, thick, slurred, grating, chocolatey, lisping

Remind children too of the impact of figures of speech such as similies, where you describe something by comparing it to something else, e.g. Skulduggery's voice is 'as smooth as velvet' or China's hair is 'as black as raven wings'. Another nice example is, 'Silence drifted down like smog.'

Ask children to:

- * Imagine a character that might appear in a *Skulduggery* adventure.
- * Write a description.
- * Draw the character and add labels to identify their key features.
- * Plan, draft and write a short story featuring your character.

4. Characters in conversation

We read or watch interviews to discover more about what people are like; how they speak, their opinions, their likes and dislikes, and what motivates them.

Look at the online interview with Derek Landy at www.skulduggerypleasant.co.uk

Discussion points

- * What did you think of it?
- * Was Derek Landy like you expected him to be?
- * Were the questions and answers interesting?
- * Were there questions that you want to ask that didn't come up?

Now, imagine that you have been invited to interview one of the characters from Skulduggery Pleasant for this website.

Ask children to decide what they are going to be, or to ensure variety, get each pair to pick character names out of a bag.

Once you have established who you are going to interview, what do you, or what do you think other people, want to know about them?

As a group, brainstorm the kinds of questions that children could use.

Ask children to:

- * Work individually or in pairs to create a set of questions.
- * Put the questions into action in role plays, taking it in turn to be interviewer and interviewee.
- * Practise the role plays and perform them for the class.

An extension activity could be to film and edit the role plays into finished pieces.