

4.1 What textual details reveal about a character

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 13 marks

Objective

Build the skills to read **agency** 主动性 and value from character.

You must be able to:

- state how a character's significance is revealed
- name the three things through which choices reveal values
- explain why inaction counts as a choice
- define agency in this context

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Significance

The significance of characters is often revealed through their agency and through nuanced descriptions. Two routes: what a character can do, and how finely they are described.

■ Three revealers of value

Characters' choices—in speech, action, and inaction—reveal what they value. Three, and the third is the one students miss.

■ Inaction

Choosing not to act is a choice. A character who says nothing when a friend is accused has revealed a value as surely as one who speaks.

■ Agency

Agency is a character's capacity to act on their situation. A character with little agency may reveal values only through speech and inaction—which is why the CED lists all three.

2 Practice

2.1 State how a character’s significance is revealed. [2]

2.2 Name the three things through which choices reveal values. [3]

2.3 Inaction is a choice.

(a) Explain why. [2]

(b) Define agency. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Significance is revealed through agency and [1]

- **A** nuanced descriptions
- **B** page length
- **C** publication date
- **D** the title

3.2 The item students most often miss is [1]

- **A** speech
- **B** inaction
- **C** action
- **D** description

3.3 A character stays silent while a friend is blamed.

(a) State what has been revealed. [1]

(b) Explain how a reader defends that reading.

[2]

4 Go further

- work through the **4.1 What textual details reveal about a character** lesson on the **Learn** page;
- read the **Short Fiction II** section of the AP English Literature handout on the **Know** page.

Solutions

2.1 through their agency and through nuanced descriptions.

2.2 speech; action; inaction.

2.3 (a) declining to act selects one outcome over another, which is what a choice is. (b) a character's capacity to act on their situation.

3.1 A. nuanced descriptions.

3.2 B. inaction.

3.3 (a) something the character values more than the friend's defence. (b) show the character could have spoken and that the text marks the silence rather than passing over it.