

>>Galit Dahan Carlibach is an Israeli writer, essayist, and creative writing teacher. Her books include the young adult series Arpilea, the two novels [The Locked Garden] and [On the Edge], which won the Prime Minister's Prize for Hebrew Writers. She has also been awarded the National Library's Pardes Scholarship and the Acum Prize.

>>Hi my name is Galit Dahan Carlibach, I am a writer from Israel, and I take part in the IWP - International Writing Program - in Iowa. And I'm still a tourist - still an excited tourist. And I have published four books so far; the fifth book will be published - the novel will be published - in December. And I also teach writing.

>>[Text on screen] Describing Character

So one of my things that a character is classified by is weight, by definition, like round and like flat. But I don't think like that, because think about it - think about the critics of Dickens: they used to claim that his characters are flat and not sophisticated, that his work is white and black and it's not round, round characters. But I think there is nobody in the world who read his books who can forget, for one moment, his characters. >>[Text on screen]Galit Dahan Carlibach

>>[Text on screen] Characterization Through Dialogue

*Little Dorrit* By Charles Dickens

I want to give you an example from *Little Dorrit*. And I chose - especially I didn't choose a character, a main character, but a marginal like Mrs. General. So it's a dialogue, it's very short: "Mrs. General and I have been in conversation about you, and we agree that you scarcely feel at home here in Venice. How is this Amy Dorrit?" She said: "I think I need a little time, father." Mrs. General, sighing: "'Papa' is a preferable form of address. 'Father' is rather vulgar. Besides, the word 'Papa' gives a pretty form to the lips: 'Papa,' 'Potatoes,' 'Poultry,' 'Prunes,' and 'Prism' are all very good words for the lips - especially 'Prunes' and 'Prism.'"

So now, in few sentences, we don't need subtitles or description about how to describe Mrs. General - we understand it by the dialogue. And you need to imagine when you are in the theater, it's not acceptable that below the characters will be a subtitle that describes the character, like Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare: "Shylock is Jewish and is greedy." No, we need to understand it from the dialogue, from the talking. So Dickens illustrated it very, very well.

>>[Text on screen]Characterization through Other Character's Point of View

*Anna Karenina* By Leo Tolstoy

Another example that I wanted to bring for how to characterize character is from *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy. So when Anna looks at her husband - when she comes from the train: "At Petersburg, as soon as the train stopped and she got out, the first person who attracted her attention was her husband. 'Oh my God, why do his ears look like that?' she thought, looking at his frigid and distinguished figure and especially at the cartilage that struck her at the moment as popping up the brim of his round hat. Catching sight of her, he came to meet her, his lips falling into their habitual mocking smile, and his big tired eyes looking straight at her." So there is another amazing example of how we can describe a character by the point-of-view of someone else.

>>[Text on screen] Characterization Through Limitations of Language

The Bible (Genesis 22)



When I think about - when I think more about the aspect of character, I think about limitations. And you know I come from Hebrew culture. Hebrew is very poor of adjectives. So it's amazing because English and Latin are so rich with a lot: gorgeous, beautiful, amazing. I cannot think of a better example as the Bible or, if to be specific, in the story of Isaac's sacrifice. Now the story is very dramatic - we cannot say that it is not dramatic. What is more dramatic than a father who goes to sacrifice his beloved son? And if you will examine the story, you will discover that there is not one adjective word - not one. It's really by verbs. So how can we know that Abraham didn't take his time? How can we know that he wasn't diligent without an adjective? So I want to read you a verse in English - for me it's very, very... something odd to do because I really know it from heart in Hebrew. But I just want to show you how this dramatic scene is so dramatic without being "very gorgeous, very beautiful," etc.

"And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him." So I'm not going to read all the - the very, very short excerpt. But I want you to think about the situation. For example, you have maybe a son or daughter that comes every day from school and they bring their drawing. And you, as a parent, want to encourage them. So you tell them, "Oh, my son, it's a beautiful drawing!" And for the next, again, because this is what they do in the schools - they don't learn, unfortunately, Latin - so they bring another drawing, and then as a good parent you say, "Oh, it's so lovely!" And the next day: "It's amazing!" And the next day: "Gorgeous!" "Awesome!" "Good!" "Excellent!" "Very nice!" "I like it!" "I love it!" I think after one month, about, if they will bring a really amazing drawing, you cannot tell them anything, because you overused the adjective.

So now we can return to the Bible and understand it, because without one adjective, we can understand that Abraham didn't take his time, he was very diligent to do what God told him. How can I know it? Because he woke - I don't remember if it's written in the English, but in the Hebrew - [HEBREW], he woke up very, very early in the morning, and he did it. So he didn't take his time. So how did I describe it? By verbs. And if I use, as a writer, verbs, it is reliability to do it, it's more reliable to do it. Because if I say, "My character is beautiful," I don't trust my skills, and I also think the reader is stupid, yes? Because why must I think that he needs to think that he's beautiful? I need to show it. So I really need to show, and if I want to say "I love you," for me the words "I love you" in the text has no meaning for me, because I can describe it. Maybe I can describe the fingers: how I was holding, how was I hugging the glass. So my character looks at his fingers and hugs the glass and maybe the character thinks to herself, "Ok, I want her," this is the subtext, that his fingers will hug me. And I didn't say "I love you" or "I love the hold of his fingers" like this. So the limitation is very, very useful.