**Elements of characterization: every description highlights, downplays, hides…**

**1. When creating a character what do you think you need to take into consideration?**

**2. Read the following descriptions of the SAME character. Compare them and comment. (who and why?). Exercise adapted from Widdowson. Texts by Alison Bouhmid**

**a)** Name: Ely Davidson

Profession: anaesthetist

Date of birth: 5.10.75

Place of birth: London

Sex: Male

Height: 1m73

Colour of hair: brown

Colour of eyes: brown

**b)** He was a stocky, pale man about forty years old with a disproportionally large head. He had cold, round eyes and tiny, lobeless ears. He was wearing a stained lab coat.

**c)** Dr. Davidson has worked at this hospital for the last ten years. Clinical director of anaesthesia and pain service, he is responsible for an annual budget of approximately £11 million pounds. He has been extremely active in developing our present interdisciplinary research, education and training programme in clinical care, thereby helping our hospital to maintain its position as an internationally recognised centre of excellence. We are proud to have had the pleasure of working with this highly eminent physician.

**d)** Like magic, a bottle appeared and liquid was poured abundantly. Have you two met? No, we haven’t. Ely, Anne, Anne, Ely. The slither of smiles. He wasn’t exactly dishy. The word made her laugh. How very 1960’s. Was she planning on eating him? He was not much taller than herself, with a long, muscular torso and a head as wide as his neck. Well, she said to herself sternly, this was real life, not tall, dark and handsome. She held out her hand to shake. With a decisive flick of his wrist, he kissed the intimate hollow of her hand with moist, uninvited lips. She snatched her hand away. He gave a slight bow, but whether in mockery or apology she did not know.

**Compare and comment:**

**3. Read the following descriptions of characters and highlight their clothes, age, physical appearance and jobs in different colours. If the job isn’t mentioned try and imagine one. Think of one adjective to describe each character.**

**a)** She was wearing grey corduroy coveralls, too big for her. All her clothes always seem too big for her. She is thirty, I think and looks eighteen. She has cobweb blonde hair, constantly adrift, a Raggedy Anne face, and a narrow, graceful, immature figure.

**John D.MacDonald, *The Quick Red Fox, (1964) p.5***

**b)** I got up and went and took a look. It was a tall girl out there, a tall girl in a severe dark suit, and a handbag that managed to give the same impression as a briefcase. She stood erect, pretending there was no wind at all. She looked as if she might be going around enrolling people in a business school.

**John D.MacDonald, *The Quick Red Fox, (1964) p.6***

**c)** Without make-up, her features were almost those of some heroic, dedicated young boy, a page from the time of King Arthur. Or an idealized Joan of Arc. Her tilted grey-green-blue Icelandic eyes were the cold of northern seas. Her hair was a rich, ripe, heavy spill of pale pale gold, curved across the high and placid brow. She had little to say, and a sleepy and disinterested way of saying it.

**John D.MacDonald, *The Quick Red Fox, (1964) p.147***

**d)** The woman next door was energetically attending to something: objects were being moved about. Then she reappeared and stood looking in at the room.

Not a young woman, as it had been easy to imagine from the vigour of her movements when still half seen in the shadows. A woman of a certain age, as the French put it, or even a bit older, and not dressed to present herself, but wearing old trousers and shirt.

This woman was alert, full of energy, yet she did not seem pleased with what she looked at. However, she shook all that off and went to her processor, sat down, put out a hand to switch on a tape.

 **Doris Lessing, *Love, Again*, (1996) p. 1**

**e)** He thought of himself as a latecomer. He had arrived too late for things that were still in the air but vanished, the whole ferment and brightness and journeyings and youth of the 1960s, the blissful dawn of what he and his contemporaries saw as a pretty blank day.  […] His father was a minor official in the County Council. His mother was a disappointed English graduate. He thought of himself as though he were an application form, for a job, a degree, a life, but when he thought of his mother, the adjective would not be expurgated. She was disappointed. In herself, in his father, in him.

[…]He lived with Val, whom he had met at a Freshers’ tea party in the Student Union when he was eighteen. He believed now, though this belief may have been a mythic smoothing of his memory, that Val was the first person his undergraduate self had spoken to, socially that was, not officially. He had liked the look of her, he remembered, a soft, brown uncertain look.

**A.S. Byatt, *Possession* (1990) p. 10-11**

**f)** My wife is beautiful. She has a smooth, flawless complexion, subtle, curiously expressive eyebrows, and a slender figure. I think those were the things which made me want to marry her, but though they have preserved themselves well in eight years they no longer have the force of a motive. She looks best in very dark or very pale colours. She is fastidious about perfumes, and tends devotedly our garden in Surrey.

**Graham Swift, *Learning to Swim and Other stories* (1982) p. 3**

**g)** He was – even in this Colony and when he was earning a few pounds a week, perfectly dressed; elegant in a suit made for ten shillings by an Indian tailor. He was of middle height, lean, stooped a little; wore a cap of absolutely smooth gleaming black hair which was rapidly receding; had a high pale forehead, extremely cold greenish eyes and authoritarian nose. He would listen patiently while people spoke, his lenses flashing, and then take off the glasses, exposing his eyes, which were at first weak and critical, and speak with a simplicity of arrogance that took everyone’s breath away.

**Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (1962) p. 86**

**4****a** The following is a list of collocations (words which are frequently used together). Underline those that you find in the texts. One word in each list does not make a strong word partnership with the word in capitals. Circle it.

1. dark, raised, black, bushy, arched, subtle, thick, plucked **EYEBROWS**
2. High, pale, placid, broad, wide, smooth, damp, hot **FOREHEAD**
3. tanned, pretty, pale, sallow, flawless, florid, ruddy **COMPLEXION**
4. Strong, handsome, regular, hawklike, harsh, heroic **FEATURES**
5. Tall, slender, immature, dark, small, slight, slim **FIGURE**
6. Puzzled, sharp, knowing, thoughtful, faraway, brown **LOOK**
7. Elegantly, casually, immaculately, interestingly, well **DRESSED**

Why do you think it might be useful to learn collocations rather than individual words?

**b)** In text **f** the character is described as having a **smooth, flawless complexion, subtle, curiously expressive eyebrows, and a slender figure**. Comment on this description.

**5. Points of View and Pronoun Revision (B1 students)**

**a)** **You have one minute to jot down**:

Subject pronouns

Object pronouns

Reflexive pronouns

**b) Have a look at the reflexive pronouns in the texts and describe who/what they refer to:**

Text d “…not dressed to present herself”

Text e “He thought **of** himself as” X 2, “She was disappointed. **In** herself, in his father, in him.”

Text f “they have preserved themselves”.

**c) What is the difference in meaning between:** ”He thought of himself as…” **and** “He thought of him as…”

**d) Translate**

Claire se regarda

Claire l’a regardé

Il l’a regardée

Claire regarda son père

Elles se sont regardées dans la glace

Ils se sont regardés dans les yeux

They talk to themselves

They talk to each other on the phone every day

**e)** Translate the two phrases: **She looks best in very dark or very pale colours**. And **she looks eighteen.** Think about the different usages ofthe word **look** and write them down**.**

**6. Writing Task**

Expand the following (make it as long as you can): ‘A woman saw a man’. To do this you need to **VISUALISE** a scene.

eg ‘When the red-headed, forty-year-old woman saw a kittenish young man sitting at the terrace smoking a roll-up she knew at once that…

Now swap papers and read your neighbour’s text.

Discuss and choose one of the expanded versions and work together to develop a story from it.