The ability to analyze how an author uses the elements of language—diction, imagery, figurative language, syntax, sound devices—to develop a character is an important reading skill. As we have already discussed this year, writers develop character through direct and indirect characterization. In direct characterization, the character is revealed through the author’s direct statements. Indirect characterization involves the following:

- what characters say (dialogue)
- what they do (action)
- what they think (interior monologue)
- what others say about them
- how the author uses syntax to reveal their traits

The following paragraph is from the novel *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, Book the First, Chapter 4, “The Preparation.” The paragraph describes Mr. Lorry, a banker at Tellson’s Bank. In just one paragraph, Dickens is able to reveal quite a bit about Mr. Lorry’s character traits.

Read the passage, noting the footnoted words.

Very orderly and methodical he looked, with a hand on each knee, and a loud watch ticking a sonorous sermon under his flapped waistcoat, as though it pitted its gravity and longevity against the levity and evanescence of the brisk fire. He had a good leg, and was a little vain of it, for his brown stockings fitted sleek and close, and were of a fine texture; his shoes and buckles, too, though plain, were trim. He wore an odd little sleek crisp flaxen wig, setting very close to his head: which wig, it is to be presumed, was made of hair, but which looked far more as though it were spun from filaments of silk or glass. His linen, though not of a fineness in accordance with his stockings, was as white as the specks of sail that glinted in the sunlight far at sea. A face, habitually suppressed and quieted, was still lighted up under the quaint wig by a pair of moist bright eyes that it must have cost their owner, in years gone by, some pains to drill to the composed and reserved expression of Tellson’s Bank. He had a healthy colour in his cheeks, and his face, though lined, bore few traces of anxiety. But perhaps the confidential bachelor clerks in Tellson’s Bank were principally occupied with the cares of other people; and perhaps second-hand cares, like second-hand clothes, come easily off and on.

1 *sonorous*: producing a full, deep, or rich sound
2 *gravity*: solemnity or dignity of manner
3 *longevity*: length of life
4 *levity*: lightness of manner of speech
5 *evanescence*: not lasting long; being likely to vanish quickly
6 *flaxen*: having the pale grayish-yellow color of flax
7 *suppressed*: subdued

In your annotation tribes, you will respond to the questions assigned your group, annotating the passage as you go. You will be expected to complete the assignment in a relatively short amount of time. At that point, you will combine with the other group that has been assigned your questions, and you will determine how to teach your section of the passage to the class. After the allotted amount of time, each group will select two representatives to lead the class in a discussion and annotations of their part of the passage.
Directions: Read the following sentences from the passage and answer the questions that follow each to determine how Dickens characterizes Mr. Lorry.

“Very orderly and methodical he looked, with a hand on each knee” (line 1).

1. What do the words “orderly and methodical” suggest about Mr. Lorry?

2. What element in this sentence is out of its usual order?

3. How does this inversion help to characterize Mr. Lorry?

(“He had a] loud watch ticking a sonorous sermon under his flapped waistcoat, as though it pitted its gravity and longevity against the levity and evanescence of the brisk fire” (lines 2–4).

4. What are the antithetical ideas in this sentence?

5. Which of these antithetical ideas is associated with Mr. Lorry?

6. Comparing the___________________________________________________________ to a___________________________________________________________ suggests that Mr. Lorry is________________________________________________________________________________

7. Dickens is using indirect characterization in this sentence. What does the reader learn from the indirect characterization that might not have been evident just from direct characterization?

8. Read the entire first sentence again, noting the balanced, orderly, even methodical structure (syntax) of this sentence.
“Very orderly and methodical he looked, with a hand on each knee, and a loud watch ticking a sonorous sermon under his flapped waistcoat, as though it pitted its gravity and longevity against the levity and evanescence of the brisk fire” (lines 1–4).

Notice that this first sentence employs several sets of balanced, parallel words:

- parallel adjectives: very orderly and methodical
- parallel objects of the preposition “with”: hand on each knee, loud watch
- parallel nouns: sonorous sermon, flapped waistcoat, gravity, longevity, levity, evanescence, brisk fire

9. How does Dickens reinforce the orderly and methodical nature of Mr. Lorry with an orderly and methodical sentence structure?

“He had a good leg, and was a little vain of it, for his brown stockings fitted sleek and close, and were of a fine texture” (lines 4–5).

10. What do these words of direct characterization reveal about Mr. Lorry?

“He wore an odd little sleek crisp flaxen wig, setting very close to his head . . .” (lines 7–8).

11. Write the adjectives which occur before the word “wig.”

________________________      ________________________  ________________________
________________________      ________________________

12. What do you notice about the length of these adjectives?

13. How do these adjectives help characterize Mr. Lorry’s appearance?
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“...which wig, it is to be presumed, was made of hair, but which looked far more as though it were spun from filaments of silk or glass” (lines 8–10).

14. Write the simile in these lines.

15. What attribute of Mr. Lorry’s character does this simile reveal?

16. What does the reader learn from the indirect characterization that might not have been evident just from direct characterization?

“His linen, though not of a fineness in accordance with his stockings, was as white as the specks of sail that glinted in the sunlight far at sea” (lines 10–12).

17. Write the simile that appears in these lines.

18. How does the simile reveal an aspect of Mr. Lorry’s character?

19. What does the reader learn from the indirect characterization that might not have been evident just from direct characterization?
“A face, habitually suppressed and quieted, was still lighted up under the quaint wig by a pair of moist bright eyes that it must have cost their owner, in years gone by, some pains to drill to the composed and reserved expression of Tellson’s Bank” (lines 12–15).

20. Paraphrase these words:

21. What character trait(s) do these words reveal about Mr. Lorry?

22. This sentence contains two pairs of parallel adjectives that reiterate both the character of Mr. Lorry and the syntactical structure of this paragraph. They offer a rephrasing of the first words of the paragraph: “orderly and methodical.” What are these two pairs of words?

“He had a healthy colour in his cheeks, and his face, though lined, bore few traces of anxiety....” (lines 15-16).

23. What do these words reveal about Mr. Lorry?

“But, perhaps the confidential bachelor clerks in Tellson’s Bank were principally occupied with the cares of other people; and perhaps second-hand cares, like second-hand clothes, come easily off and on” (lines 17–20).

24. After reading this sentence, can you now understand why Mr. Lorry’s “face, though lined, bore few traces of anxiety”?

25. How does the simile explain why Mr. Lorry’s face “bore few traces of anxiety”?

(Combined Activity)

26. Fill in the blanks below with adjectives that describe the character of Mr. Lorry. Do not use any of the adjectives from the passage.

Dickens depicts Mr. Lorry as ________________________________, ________________________________, and ________________________________.