

# Boost Free Lessons - Year 9 English

## Lesson 12: Reading Prose Fiction: Character

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Read the extract below carefully. The line numbers will help you refer to specific parts of the text in your answers.

### The Understudy

- 1 Ines had known the part for eleven weeks. She had learned it in the wings,  
2 which is not the same as learning it on the stage, and she was aware of the  
3 difference in the way you are aware of a stone in your shoe.  
4  
5 "You'll be fine," said Bao, who had never once been fine and said it  
6 anyway.  
7  
8 In the dressing room, Marguerite was being helped out of the costume. She  
9 had done nothing wrong. She had simply fallen down four steps in the dark  
10 and would not be walking anywhere for six weeks, and now she sat with her  
11 ankle raised and watched a nineteen-year-old being sewn into her sleeves.  
12  
13 "The second act," Marguerite said.  
14  
15 Ines looked up.  
16  
17 "Don't rush the pause before the letter. Everyone rushes it. It's four  
18 seconds and it feels like a year, and if you hold it they'll lean in."  
19  
20 It was the only note she gave. Ines had expected either kindness or  
21 resentment, had prepared something to say for each, and had prepared  
22 nothing at all for advice.  
23  
24 "Four seconds," Ines said.  
25  
26 "Four. Not three."  
27  
28 Later, in the second act, Ines held the pause and heard eight hundred  
29 people go quiet, and understood that Marguerite had given her the only  
30 thing she had left to give, and had done it without being asked.



### Worked Example 1

**How does the writer reveal Marguerite's character without describing her directly?**

1. Characters are revealed through **action**, **dialogue** and what they choose **not** to do.
2. Notice what Marguerite does not do. She does not complain, blame Ines, or mention her own injury.
3. Her only line of dialogue is technical advice about a pause, which shows what she values.
4. The narrator names what was expected in lines 20 to 22, which highlights how her behaviour differs from it.

**Model: Marguerite is revealed entirely through what she does not do. She offers no complaint and no resentment, and her single note about the pause shows that she values the performance above her own position.**

**Remember:** Characters are built through **action**, **dialogue** and **omission**. Ask what a character chooses not to say, and what the narrator tells you they expected instead.



**Question 1:** Answer the following questions. Give the line numbers you used in your answers.

1. How long has Ines known the part?

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2. How did Marguerite injure herself?

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3. How long will she be unable to walk?

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4. How old is Ines?

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5. What advice does Marguerite give?

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6. How many people are in the audience?

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**Question 2:** Answer the following questions in full sentences.

1. Ines compares her awareness to a stone in her shoe. Explain what this suggests about how she feels.

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2. What does the description of Bao suggest about him?

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3. Why does the writer tell us Ines had prepared for kindness and resentment?

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4. How does Ines change over the course of the extract?

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5. Explain the significance of the final sentence.

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**Answers and Model Responses:** Reading Prose Fiction: Character**Question 1**

1. Eleven weeks.
2. She fell down four steps in the dark.
3. Six weeks.
4. Nineteen.
5. Not to rush the four-second pause before the letter.
6. Eight hundred.

**Question 2**

1. Model: A stone in your shoe is a small, constant irritation that cannot be ignored. It suggests Ines's worry is not dramatic but persistent, and always present underneath everything else.
2. Model: He offers reassurance he has never felt himself, which makes him kind rather than confident. The aside also gives the extract a wry, affectionate tone.
3. Model: It shows Ines had thought carefully about how Marguerite might react, and that both possibilities were about Marguerite's feelings. Advice was outside what she had imagined, which makes the generosity more striking.
4. Model: Ines begins anxious and self-conscious, aware only of the gap between rehearsal and performance. By the end she has stopped thinking about herself and understands what the advice cost Marguerite, which shows a shift from nerves to perspective.
5. Model: Marguerite has lost the role and cannot perform, so her knowledge is the only thing left that she can give. Giving it unasked shows generosity, and Ines only recognises it once the advice has worked, which is why the realisation is placed after the pause rather than before it.

