

15: Analysing Description of Characters

Read the following extract taken from John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* in which two friends working on a ranch together are described:

Two men emerged from the path and came into the opening by the green pool. They had walked in single file down the path, and even in the open one stayed behind the other. Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats and both carried tight blanket rolls slung over their shoulders. The first man was small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did not swing at his sides, but hung loosely and only moved because the hands were pendula*. The first man stopped short in the clearing, and the follower nearly ran over him. He took off his hat and wiped the sweatband with his forefinger and snapped the moisture off. His huge companion dropped his blankets and flung himself down and drank from the surface of the green pool; drank with long gulps, snorting into the water like a horse. The small man stepped nervously beside him.

How does the writer use language to describe the characters in this extract?

Complete the table below using specific quotations and analysing the effect of each quotation. Consider the writer's use of contrast in his description of the men.

Quotation	Technique used + suggestion + effect on reader

16: Justifying an Opinion

Read the following extract taken from Maya Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*:

Mrs. Bertha Flowers was the aristocrat of [the Black Community]. She had the grace of control to appear warm in the coldest weather, and on the Arkansas summer days it seemed she had a private breeze which swirled around, cooling her. She was thin without the taut look of wiry people, and her printed voile dresses and flowered hats were as right for her as denim overalls for a farmer. She was our side's answer to the richest white woman in town.

Her skin was a rich black that would have peeled like a plum if snagged, but then no one would have thought of getting close enough to Mrs. Flowers to ruffle her dress, let alone snag her skin. She didn't encourage familiarity. She wore gloves too.

I don't think I ever saw Mrs. Flowers laugh, but she smiled often. A slow widening of her thin black lips to show even, small white teeth, then the slow effortless closing. When she chose to smile on me, I always wanted to thank her. The action was so graceful and inclusively benign.

She was one of the few gentlewomen I have ever known, and has remained throughout my life the measure of what a human being can be.

A student, having read this extract, claimed: 'Mrs Flowers is presented as a noble and kindly figure.'

Complete the table below by finding three quotations that **prove** this statement, and explain why. Consider the use of language techniques by the writer:

Quotation from the extract	Explanation of how it proves the statement