

# The Characterization of Manny Hernandez in *Parrot in the Oven*

## I. INTRODUCTION:

- A. At the beginning, middle or end of the introduction you must have a **thesis statement**. The thesis statement includes the author and title of the work you are discussing and the idea you are proving. Everything else contributes to demonstrating your understanding of why your thesis is correct.

Example: Victor Martinez' autobiographical novel, *Parrot in the Oven*, provides a good (excellent, poor) example of the use of writing strategies to create a character.

**OR**

Victor Martinez uses action, dialogue and interior monologue to create a believable character in his autobiographical novel *Parrot in the Oven*.

- B. Here are some questions you may want to answer in your introduction:

- What are Manny's dominant characteristics, both positive and negative?  
(All that you name, you must discuss in the essay.)
- Who else is in the story?
- What is the big picture?

For example, this is a coming of age novel in which a young man, Manny Hernandez,....(summarize what happens to him)

- C. Often the introduction outlines for the reader the order in which you will discuss the upcoming categories, in this case the strategies.

Example: The three dominant strategies that bring Manny to life are: action, dialogue and interior monologue. (Then you would discuss them in that same order.)

## II. BODY:

- A. Organize the body of the essay by category, in this case, writing strategy, in order, according to the most to the least used strategy or vice versa.

1. Action
2. Dialogue

### 3. Interior Monologue

**Note:** Mention here that Manny is not only a character but also the narrator: first person narrator, so the reader knows his thoughts and point of view throughout the story.

B. Now make an outline for the strategies and the examples (at least three to five per strategy) that you are going to discuss.

Example outline for the body of your paper:

II. Strategies: (This is the *body* of your paper.)

A. Action:

1. Goes to pick chilies
2. Follows father around house picking up after him when he's looking for a bullet
3. Comforts his little sister Pedi, slipping a bullet into her hand
4. Goes to party even though he's not wanted
5. Allows himself to get beat up in order to have the chance to kiss a girl.

B. Dialogue

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

C. Interior Monologue

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Important questions to answer in your discussion:

- How does Manny change from an innocent young man whose only goal in life is to own a baseball glove so he can play outfield, to someone who gets beat up to join a gang so he can kiss a girl, to someone who rejects criminal activity and "goes home"? With these changes what has he lost? What has he gained?
- What ethnic and socioeconomic circumstances shape his goals and life experience?
- What is the meaning of the title of the last chapter "Going Home"?

**111. CONCLUSION:**

- Brief summary of your observations.
- Have you shown the character to be realistic: Do any of his thoughts, words and actions remind you of any you've experienced or heard about?
- Have you proven the character is somewhat complex, that is, does he have any contradictions, i.e., aggressive yet afraid?
- Your final evaluation of the how well the character was created.

**REMEMBER:**

- Discuss literature in the *present tense*:  
Example: Manny *is* a young man of action. When he *decides* to own a baseball glove....
- When you quote from the book, use quote marks before and after the exact words and put the page number in parentheses.  
Example: Magda is suffering, so Manny asks, "Are we going to take her to the hospital?" (153)  
or  
Manny is intensely afraid of his father. "I wanted to run, but I couldn't signal my legs to move."(47)
- Avoid "Dead Words." Refer to list for alternatives.
- Avoid using the first person: I think, I will prove
- Avoid writing "In conclusion." You don't need it.

## USEFUL VOCABULARY

- **Verbs:** to inform, to show, to demonstrate, to illuminate, to express, to expose, to reveal, to explain, to characterize \_\_\_\_\_ as, to emphasize, to underline, to evolve
- **Adjectives:** realistic, believable, true-to-life, authentic
- **Literary terms:** coming of age novel, epiphany, narrator, point of view, character, simile, ironically
- **Linking words:** in the beginning, at first, later, then, another, yet another, again, once again, finally, at the end