

Name _____

Date _____

Analyze Character and Theme

An author develops characters by describing what they do and say, how they interact with other characters, and how they change during the story. Details about the characters often develop the story's themes.

Read the following short story excerpt and answer the questions.

The Bridge Builder

Old Tom stood at the edge of the ravine, his weathered hands gripping a hammer. At seventy-two, his back ached constantly, but he continued working on the bridge that would connect the two sides of the village. The younger men had abandoned the project months ago, declaring it impossible after the spring floods washed away their first attempt.

"You're wasting your time, old man," called Eli, the baker's son, as he passed by. "That bridge won't hold any better than the last one."

Tom didn't respond but continued measuring and cutting the timber. Every morning at sunrise, he crossed the long path around the ravine to work on his bridge, and every evening at sunset, he returned home the same way. The villagers had grown accustomed to the sight of the old carpenter working alone.

One afternoon, Mira, a twelve-year-old girl from the village, stopped to watch him work.

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"Why do you keep building?" she asked. "Everyone says it will fall again."

Tom set down his tools and looked at her. "I'm not building it for them," he said. "I'm building it for those who come after me."

"But you might not even get to use it," Mira pointed out. Tom smiled. "Some work isn't about what you get from it," he replied. "It's about what you leave behind."

Weeks passed, and slowly other villagers began to help—first Mira, then her father, then others. By winter, the bridge stood strong across the ravine. Tom was the first to cross it, with the entire village watching. As his foot touched the other side, applause erupted.

"I didn't think it could be done," admitted Eli.

"Most worthwhile things seem impossible," Tom replied, "until someone stubborn enough comes along."

1. How would you describe Tom's character based on his actions and words?

2. What does the bridge symbolize in this story?

3. How does Tom's character contribute to the development of the story's theme?

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Analyze Character and Theme-Answer Key

1. How would you describe Tom's character based on his actions and words?

Tom is persistent, dedicated, and selfless, continuing his work despite physical pain, ridicule, and previous failure. He values legacy over immediate gratification.

2. What does the bridge symbolize in this story?

The bridge symbolizes perseverance, connection between people, overcoming obstacles, and creating a legacy that benefits future generations.

3. How does Tom's character contribute to the development of the story's theme?

Tom's determination despite others' doubt illustrates the theme that perseverance and selfless work can inspire communities and create lasting positive change.