

Finding examples of characterisation techniques

It's always useful to carefully observe what successful authors do. Reading lots of stories will give you plenty of practice! Additionally, you can zoom in on specific techniques by using the CLiC web application. CLiC can help you research words and phrases that are frequently used to describe fictional characters and their body language.

Example: The eyes as the mirror to the soul

Below are examples of how Dickens uses the word *eyes* in *Oliver Twist*. What meanings does the description of the eyes help to convey in each of the three examples?

- (1) Oliver, whose **eyes** had glistened at the mention of meat, and who was trembling with eagerness to devour it, replied in the negative; and a plateful of coarse broken victuals was set before him.
- (2) 'Save us!' said the old lady, with tears in her **eyes**.
- (3) 'Not I,' said Monks, turning away his **eyes** and beating his foot upon the ground, as a man who is determined to deny everything. 'Not I.'

As eyes are so meaningful, we also talk about 'eye language' as a special type of body language. To find more examples of eye language, you can look at a 'concordance', i.e. a list of all the occurrences of eyes in *Oliver Twist*, as in this sample here:

4	away two or three tears that were lingering in his	eyes;	and seeing no board but the table, fortunately bowed to	OT
5	they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager	eyes,	as if they could have devoured the very bricks of	OT
6	dismal night came on, spread his little hands before his	eyes	to shut out the darkness, and crouching in the corner	OT
7	his brains and his donkey, when passing the workhouse, his	eyes	encountered the bill on the gate. ¶ 'Wo--o!' said Mr	OT
8	recreation on the donkey generally, but more particularly on his	eyes;	and, running after him, bestowed a blow on his head	OT
9	to fatten him up in that way. ¶ 'Don't make your	eyes	red, Oliver, but eat your food and be thankful,' said	OT
10	effect his eloquence had produced; 'Come, Oliver! Wipe your	eyes	with the cuffs of your jacket, and don't cry into	OT
11	made his best obeisance. He had been wondering, with his	eyes	fixed on the magistrates' powder, whether all boards were bor	OT
12	dreadful man. ¶ 'Well!' said Mr. Bumble, raising his hands and	eyes	with most impressive solemnity. 'Well! of all the artful and	OT
13	by three inches deep--he pulled his cap over his	eyes;	and once more attaching himself to Mr. Bumble's coat cuff	OT
14	in a low, tremulous voice. ¶ 'Pull that cap off your	eyes,	and hold up your head, sir.' ¶ Although Oliver did as	OT
15	passed the back of his unoccupied hand briskly across his	eyes,	he left a tear in them when he looked up	OT
16	something about 'that troublesome cough,' bade Oliver dry his	eyes	and be a good boy. Then once more taking his	OT
17	too dainty to eat 'em--are you, boy?' ¶ Oliver, whose	eyes	had glistened at the mention of meat, and who was	OT

To retrieve a full list follow these easy steps.

Exercise: Retrieving examples of eyes in *Oliver Twist*

1. Open the **CLiC website** in the Chrome browser (clic.bham.ac.uk)
2. Click on the **“Concordance tab”** (1.)
3. Under **“Search the corpora”** (2.), select **“Oliver Twist”**.
4. Under **“Search for terms”**, enter **“eyes”** (3.). When you hit return you will see the examples of eyes appear in the concordance view.

Showing 1 to 50 of 204 entries, Rel. Freq. 1299.69 pm, from 1 book

Left	Node	Right	Book	In bk.
1 affy, Mrs. Mann? inquired Bumble, following with his	eyes	the interesting process of mixing. ¶ 'Ah, bless 'em, th	OT	
2 the nurse. 'I couldn't see 'em suffer before my very	eyes,	you know sir.' ¶ 'No'; said Mr. Bumble approvingly; 'n	OT	
3 difficult matter for the boy to call tears into his	eyes.	Hunger and recent ill-usage are great assistants if y	OT	
4 away two or three tears that were lingering in his	eyes;	and seeing no board but the table, fortunately bowe	OT	
5 they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager	eyes,	as if they could have devoured the very bricks of	OT	
6 mal night came on, spread his little hands before his	eyes	to shut out the darkness, and crouching in the corne	OT	
7 ins and his donkey, when passing the workhouse, his	eyes	encountered the bill on the gate. ¶ 'Wo--o!' said Mr	OT	
8 on the donkey generally, but more particularly on his	eyes;	and, running after him, bestowed a blow on his head	OT	
9 to fatten him up in that way. ¶ 'Don't make your	eyes	red, Oliver, but eat your food and be thankful,' said	OT	
10 is eloquence had produced; 'Come, Oliver! Wipe your	eyes	with the cuffs of your jacket, and don't cry into	OT	
11 his best obeisance. He had been wondering, with his	eyes	fixed on the magistrates' powder, whether all boards	OT	
12 man. ¶ 'Well!' said Mr. Bumble, raising his hands and	eyes	with most impressive solemnity. 'Well! of all the artf	OT	

5. To get from a concordance line to a full text extract, click on the slider to see the **“in bk.”** (“in book”) view (4.). Your search word will be highlighted in yellow.

This was no very great consolation to the child. Young as he was, however, he had sense enough to make a feint of feeling great regret at going away. It was no very difficult matter for the boy to call tears into his eyes. Hunger and recent ill-usage are great assistants if you want to cry; and Oliver cried very naturally indeed. Mrs. Mann gave him a thousand embraces, and what Oliver wanted a great deal more, a piece of bread and butter, less he should seem too hungry when he got to the workhouse. With the slice of bread in his hand, and the little brown-cloth parish cap on his head, Oliver was then led away by Mr. Bumble from the wretched home where one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years. And yet he burst into an agony of childish grief, as the cottage-gate closed after him. Wretched as were the little companions in misery he was leaving behind, they were the only friends he had ever known; and a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world, sank into the child's heart for the first time.

A **concordance** displays all occurrences of a word in a text (or set of texts). It enables you to explore words in context and across the development of a text.

Other resources you might want to check out

- Our CLiC Activity Book: www.birmingham.ac.uk/clic-activity-book
- A short video on CLiC: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnP2fkuocAA>

You can use and adapt this handout for your own classroom activities as it is available

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