

talking about character

The 'people' that stories are about are called the **characters**.

Characters can be described in a physical sense (e.g. *short, brown eyes, wears a hat* etc.) but to understand why characters do things, children also need to think about how they might feel.

When talking about character, we can discuss attitudes and feelings e.g. *sad, happy, worried, scared, unkind*. In doing this, children develop **empathy**.

Children are aware of their own feelings, but being able to recognise those feelings in others - to empathise - is an important part of understanding literature.

Empathy enables a reader to imagine another person's experience, especially what it must be like to be that person in a story.

The four picture books used as examples in this project are:

- *A Balloon for Grandad* by Nigel Gray and Jane Ray (Orchard Books)
- *Farmer Duck* by Martin Waddell and Helen Oxenbury (Walker Books)
- *Pumpkin Soup* by Helen Cooper (Picture Corgi)
- *My Two Grannies* by Floella Benjamin and Margaret Chamberlain (Frances Lincoln)

For more recommended books, plus ideas, activities and tips for sharing picture books, visit www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk

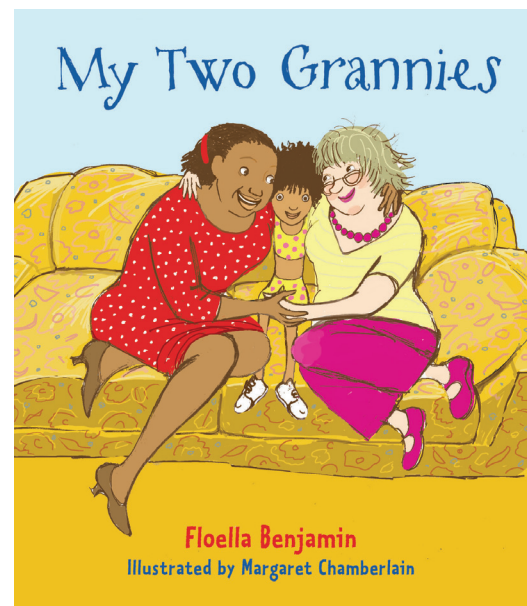
Try this:

Look together at the front cover of *My Two Grannies*.

How do you think the three characters in the picture are feeling? Are they happy or sad? How can we tell they like each other?

Now turn to look at the title page. How do the two Grannies look in this picture? What do you think might be happening? Happy on one page, cross on the next: children will be able to spot that there is going to be conflict in this story.

Now go on to read the story together. As it progresses, we will learn more about Granny Vero and Granny Rose; however, it is the little girl, Alvina who has the 'characteristics' in her personality that will help to resolve the problem.



Pumpkin Soup

Cat, Squirrel and Duck each have distinct personalities: Duck is a little thoughtless and likes trying new things; whilst Cat and Squirrel are more sensible and set in their ways.

What words would children use to describe them?

Farmer Duck

Look at the Duck at the start of the story. He looks overworked and tired: we see him with his head bowed and his eyes lined. How do you think he is feeling?

Now look at the Duck at the end of the story. How do you think he feels now? Look together at how his expression changes.

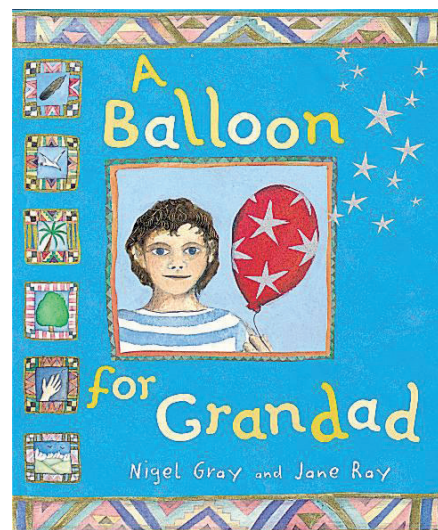
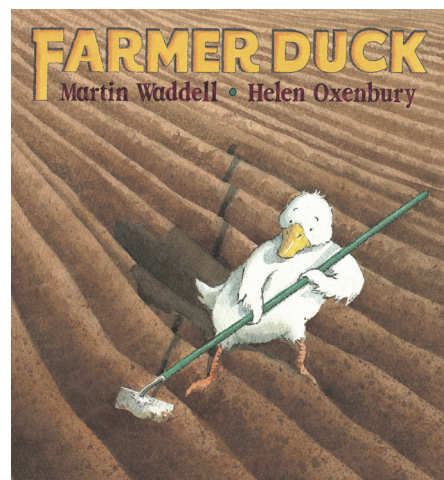
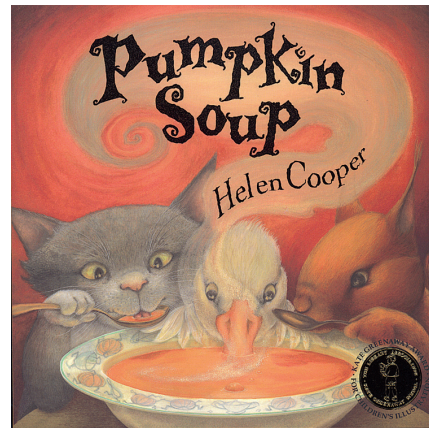
What words could we use to describe the farmer's character? e.g. *old, greedy, bossy, lazy...*

A Balloon for Grandad

How do we know that the family in this story care for each other?

Ask children to identify clues that show how they feel i.e. Dad wants to comfort Sam; Grandad likes to be reminded of his grandson; and despite losing his lovely balloon, Sam is pleased to have made his grandfather happy.

Look for the photograph of an old man on the back wall. Do you think this might be Grandad?



Farmer Duck cover illustration © 1991 Helen Oxenbury
Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd,
London SE11 5HJ. www.walker.co.uk