

Sample Paragraph: The Memorable Characterization of Mrs. Joe

Though she is essentially a nasty shrew for much of the novel, one character in *Great Expectations* whose rich description and idiosyncrasies make her particularly memorable is Mrs. Joe. More than 20 years older than Pip, she provides him the basic necessities of life, but she is otherwise completely without motherly instincts. Mrs. Joe is first described as abusive to both her young brother as well as her husband: "...she had brought me up 'by hand,' Pip says he knew her "to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me...." Her hand is not the only thing she uses as a weapon. "Tickler" is a cane, Pip reports, "...worn smooth by collision with my tickled frame." Within three pages of meeting her in Chapter 2, the reader already has a clear picture of Mrs. Joe as a tyrannical and unreasonable woman who resorts to violence with both Pip and Joe. As he often does with his characters, Dickens then has Mrs. Joe's physical description match her temperament: "...black hair and eyes...such a prevailing redness of skin, that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap." This kind of vivid physical description, filtered through the keenly observant lens of an often sarcastic narrator, not only generates a laugh but also guarantees that the reader will remember the character. Such idiosyncrasies are also used as the basis of much subtle humor. Mrs. Joe's coarse apron, for example, was "fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles." In itself, this is curious enough because we don't usually picture a needle-riddled apron as typical dress of a housewife, but later Pip explains how she would cut his bread: "...she jammed the loaf hard and fast against her bib—where it sometimes got a pin into it, and sometimes a needle, which we afterwards got into our mouths." The set-up is the original description of the pins and needles in the apron, and the punch line occurs a couple pages later when the reader discovers that Pip often ends up eating them, which further contributes to our conception of Mrs. Joe as a mean and tyrannical caretaker. Her violent temper, abusive outbursts, controlling demeanor, and matching physical description are idiosyncrasies that provide the reader with a compelling picture of this character, who will not be soon forgotten.

TOPIC SENTENCE:
CLAIM

SUPPORTING
IDEA #1

EVIDENCE:
QUOTE FROM TEXT
THAT ILLUSTRATES
IDEA #1

WARRANT:
HOW EVIDENCE
SUPPORTS CLAIM/
IDEA #1

SUPPORTING
IDEA #2

EVIDENCE:
QUOTE FROM TEXT
THAT ILLUSTRATES
IDEA #2

WARRANT:
HOW EVIDENCE
SUPPORTS CLAIM/
IDEA #2

SUPPORTING
IDEA #3

EVIDENCE:
QUOTE FROM
TEXT THAT
ILLUSTRATES
IDEA #3

WARRANT:
HOW EVIDENCE
SUPPORTS
CLAIM/IDEA #3

CONCLUSION:
RESTATEMENT
OF CLAIM