

Name: _____

Date: _____

Section: ____

Character Analysis Planner

Store this assignment on your laptop and print out a copy for our second day of English class. As you read, pay special attention to the main character (the protagonist) and how that character changes. For each of your quotes, please include a page number in parentheses after the quote (refer to the sample).

INTRODUCTION

Title:	<u>Atonement</u>
Author:	Ian McEwan
Character's name and general description:	Briony Tallis is a thirteen-year-old girl in 1935 England. She is an aspiring writer and is obsessed with telling stories. Briony is curious, inquisitive, and meticulous in her work.
Include a quote or two that describes your character's personality. What does it tell us?	<p>"She was one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world just so. Whereas her big sister's room was a stew of unclosed books, unfolded clothes, unmade bed, unemptied ashtrays, Briony's was a shrine to her controlling demon: the model farm spread across a deep window ledge consisted of the usual animals, but all facing one way--towards their owner--as if about to break into song, and even the farmyard hens were neatly corralled. In fact, Briony's was the only tidy upstairs room in the house" (4-5).</p> <p>This quote tells us that Briony is meticulous and likes to be in control. It might also suggest that she likes to be the center of attention (based on her stuffed animals).</p>
How does this character change?	Through the course of the book (which spans over 60 years), Briony becomes wiser and more mature. Early on, she commits a horrible act, and much of the rest of the story deals with the dire consequences of her actions. Ultimately, she accepts responsibility for her crime and learns that forgiveness won't always be given, or deserved.

CAUSE: Event I

What is one encounter, situation, or event that changes the character?	One key event takes place when Briony witnesses the assault of her cousin, Lola. Because of earlier events in the story, Briony mistakenly identifies her attacker as her sister's boyfriend, Robbie Turner. On the basis of Briony's testimony, Robbie is sent to jail.
On what page(s) does this event take place?	154-158

<p>Include an important quotation or two from this section to illustrate this event:</p>	<p>“It was Robbie, wasn’t it?” The maniac, she wanted to say. Lola said nothing and did not move. Briony said it again, this time without the trace of a question. It was a statement of fact. “It was Robbie” (156).</p> <p>If her poor cousin was not able to command the truth, then she would do it for her. <i>I can. And I will</i> (158).</p>
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CAUSE: Event II

Another encounter, situation, or event that changes the character:	A second event (or series of events) that helps to change Briony and make her more mature is her experience as a nurse in World War II-era London. She treats many soldiers with horrible wounds and injuries and as a result becomes more mature.
On what page(s) does this event take place?	253-298
Include an important quotation or two from this section to illustrate this event:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was a time of adapting to unthinking obedience.... Physical discomfort helped close down Briony's mental horizons (259). • Why could Briony not visit, even for a day.... And why did she write so infrequently? It was difficult to give a straight answer. For now it was necessary to stay away (263). • The age of clear answers was over. So was the age of characters and plots. Despite her journal sketches, she no longer believed in characters (265). <p>[The description of the soldier with the missing nose (280)]</p>

EFFECT: The Transformation – The heart of your paper:

How does this character grow, mature or change by the end of the story (based on the above events)?	She becomes remorseful, and then strives to atone for the pain she's inflicted on Robbie and on her sister, Cecelia. At the end of the story, she is an old woman, and has written a book detailing the truth. Though the book can't be published in her lifetime, and though Cecelia and Robbie do not forgive her, she does achieve peace.
Include two or more important quotations/passages that clearly show this change:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the beginning of the book, Briony is sensitive and easily offended. She also feels the need to fit individuals into the logical framework imposed by stories. She is self-righteous and confident when condemning Robbie as the rapist: "Briony was their only source, and she made herself speak calmly. Her vital role fueled her certainty" (163). • Later, she is plagued by her own guilt over what she has done and her certainty is gone: What troubled Briony in her later years was "her fragmented recollection of that late night and summer dawn. How guilt refined the methods of self-torture, threading the beads of detail into an eternal loop, a rosary to be fingered for a lifetime" (162).

Conclusion

What do you think this character's transformation is teaching the reader about life? What is the author trying to say through this character's journey? What can be learned from him or her?
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Briony's actions show us how easily great damage can be done to someone else's life. McEwan is also showing his readers that not all of this damage is reparable, or even forgivable. Briony tries to atone for the actions of her 13-year-old self, by cutting herself off from her family, by volunteering as a nurse, and by writing a tell-all book, but ultimately she cannot earn forgiveness. Yet while absolution at the hands of Robbie and her sister escapes her, she does achieve a kind of peace. Readers learn about the power that accusations can have.