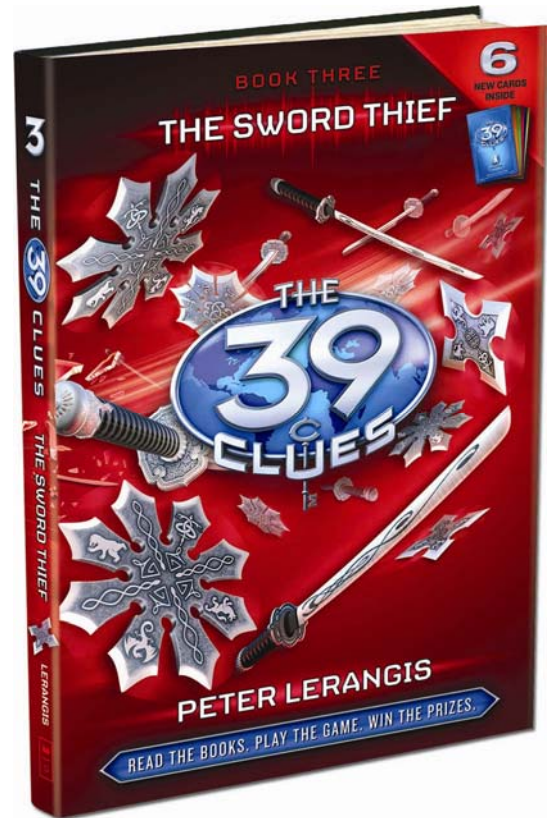


# The 39 Clues Book #3: *The Sword Thief* Teacher's Guide

## Theme: Characterization



### Guide to The 39 Clue #3: *The Sword Thief* By Peter Lerangis

Theme of this section: Characterization

Use this guide to help your students see the color characters bring to a story.

#### **What the Book is About**

Amy and Dan Cahill have been located once again, this time in the company of the notoriously unreliable Alistair Oh. Could they have been foolish enough to make an alliance? Spies report that Amy and Dan seem to be tracking the life of one of the most powerful fighters the world has ever known. If this fearsome warrior was a Cahill, his secrets are sure to be well guarded . . . and the price to uncover them just might be lethal.

#### **About the Author**

Peter Lerangis is the author of over 150 books, for early readers through teens, which have sold nearly 3 million copies. He injects his own brand of suspense, humor, and colorful characters into many different writing genres - mystery (the Spy X series), science fiction (the Watchers series), teen romance (the Drama Club series), and serious historical fiction (Smiler's Bones). Scholastic is pleased to announce him as the author of Book 3 of The 39 Clues, entitled [\*The Sword Thief\*](#).

#### **Characterization — Powerful Literary Tool or Cahill Secret?**

While plot is the road map of a story, characterization is the car that drives the story to its destination. Reading for character can be more difficult than reading for plot. However, helping

your students learn this literary skill can transform their reading journey from a drab interstate road trip to a vibrant scenic Sunday drive!

What is this powerful literary tool? Is it a Cahill secret? NO! It is simply a device the author uses to help the reader empathize with the protagonist (main character) and secondary characters in a story. By feeling and sensing what is happening to the people in the story, the reader is able to live vicariously through the character. It is like the reader is actually Dan or Amy on the hunt for The 39 Clues!

Authors use a variety of techniques to introduce the reader to their characters. While artists can draw the details for all to see, authors must paint with words for the reader to uncover. In fact, many are like clues — some are easy to spot like dialogue; while others require a deeper level of detective work like examining a character's motivation through actions, dialog and background.

### **Clues that can make characters come to life:**

#### **Physical Description**

Authors use adjectives, similes, and metaphors to make the character realistic so the reader can clearly see them in their mind and be able to respond to them. This is the easiest type of character clue because authors tend to tell the reader the information.

#### **Dialog and Thoughts**

This type of character clue is easy to find but must be translated by the reader into information about the character. Dialog breathes life into the character's personality. It is an opportunity to "hear" the character in the reader's mind. In *The Sword Thief*, the reader is able to "see" into Irina's mind when she thinks, "They will betray you, Alistair, unless you betray them first." The author goes on to state, "Thoughts of human weakness always picked up her spirits..." Should anyone ever trust Irina? Why does she love human weakness? What do her thoughts reveal about Irina?

#### **Actions and Gestures**

Do actions speak louder than words? In characterization, actions bring another dimension to a character. When the characters are Cahill's, the actions might just mean more than the words they speak! Amy learns that Ian Kabra's actions can be deceiving in this book. What does this plot twist tell the reader about Amy? Why is she trusting? What does it tell us about Ian Kabra that he manipulated Amy into liking him?

#### **Revelations about the Past**

While Dan and Amy are trying to find the 39 Clues with very little luggage, their emotional baggage they carry is enormous! A character's psychological outlook provides the reader with clues about their actions based upon their history. In *The Sword Thief*, the reader learns more about Alistair Oh's past. How do his Uncle Bae's actions in the past to get to the 39 Clues shape Alistair's actions in the present?

#### **Dialect or Way of Speaking**

Dialect or the way a character speaks can offer information from not only what part of the world they are from, but also their educational, economic, and social influences. It is from dialect that the reader can "see" Irina Spatsky as an ex-KGB agent. While the way the Eisenhowers speak to one another reinforces their extra large view of life! What does Amy's stuttering tell us about her character? Do you believe that Jonah Wizard is really a gansta?

#### **Activities**

It's in the Adjectives In their investigation journal, have students sleuth for clues (and adjectives)

about each of the characters. Based upon the descriptions they have uncovered, students will draw a detailed picture of their favorite character.

Dialogue Drama: Students can pair up and create a new character for the series. Using only dialogue, students must paint a picture of this new Cahill without the use of props or costumes.

Dress Up! Based upon the physical descriptions of the characters in The 39 Clues Series, have students dress up as their favorite character and act out their favorite scene.

Revelation Round Up Have students brainstorm revelations and clues about each character's past. As a group, put the revelations in a T-graph labeling one side revelation and the other side prediction. Discuss with students how certain events in a person's past history influence their actions. What predictions can they make about future books based upon this information?

Character Chaos Create name cards of each of the characters in *The Sword Thief*. Place one card on the back of each student. The remaining students will be the clue-givers. They may only tell each "character" one clue about their person. Instruct the students that they are to give clues based upon what they know about the character from the book. See how many clues it takes for the student with cards to figure out their character. This activity can be changed each round so that one time clue-givers may only reveal physical descriptions, the next it might be character behavior. Continue rounds until all students have had a turn to be clue-givers and "characters."

*Guide written by Laura Stockwell, Fifth Grade Teacher, Orlando, Florida*