

Activity 1: Character Sketches

Task: Write brief character sketches of the old man, Pelayo, and Elisenda, based on the traits provided in the story and the table on PAGE7.

Instructions for Students: Use the physical traits, personality traits, and significance in the story to create a vivid description of each character. Focus on their actions, motivations, and how they contribute to the story's themes of compassion and human nature.

Character Sketches

The Old Man

The old man with enormous wings is a mysterious and frail figure, embodying vulnerability and otherworldliness. Physically, he is described as old, with a bald skull, few teeth, and enormous, dirty, half-plucked wings resembling those of a buzzard. His pitiful condition, lying face down in the mud and unable to rise due to his cumbersome wings, evokes sympathy. His personality is marked by patience and resilience, as he endures the crowd's mistreatment—being pecked by hens, pelted with stones, and treated as a spectacle—without retaliation. His incomprehensible dialect and sailor-like voice add to his enigmatic nature. In the story, he represents the weak and marginalized, serving as a mirror to society's lack of compassion. His eventual flight symbolizes liberation and the fleeting nature of miracles.

Pelayo

Pelayo is a practical and responsible man, grounded in the realities of his modest life. Physically, the story does not provide explicit details about his appearance, but his actions—such as working as a bailiff and handling the old man—suggest a sturdy, working-class individual. His personality reflects pragmatism and caution; he is initially frightened by the old man but soon overcomes his fear, locking him in the chicken coop and later capitalizing on his presence by charging admission. Pelayo represents ordinary people who grapple with the extraordinary, often prioritizing survival over empathy. His significance lies in his transformation from fear to acceptance, and eventually to indifference, highlighting the human tendency to exploit the unusual for personal gain.

Elisenda

Elisenda is a loving yet shrewd mother, balancing maternal instincts with a keen sense of opportunity. Like Pelayo, her physical description is minimal, but her actions—caring for her sick child and later managing the crowd—suggest a practical, multitasking woman. Her personality is complex; she shows initial fear and pity for the old man but quickly turns his presence into a profitable venture by charging admission. Her decision to buy luxurious items with the earnings reveals her materialistic streak. In the story, Elisenda represents maternal instincts overshadowed by self-interest. Her final sigh of relief when the old man flies away reflects her mixed feelings of burden and freedom, underscoring the story's theme of fleeting compassion.

