



An Analysis of The Characterization of the Main Characters in The Bad Guys (2022)

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-08-15 Revised: 2026-10-12 Accepted: 2026-10-16 Keywords: <i>characterization; Murphy's theory; animated film; The Bad Guys</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.11969 Corresponding Author: Ida Bagus Arinatha Valentino Manuaba arinathavalentino6@gmail.com English Literature Study Program, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar	<i>This article examines how seven major characters in the animated film The Bad Guys (2022) are portrayed, drawing on Murphy's (1972) theory of characterization. A descriptive qualitative approach was used. Selected dialogue and actions were identified by viewing the film repeatedly and checking its English subtitles. The analysis focuses on speech and behavior as evidence of personality. Mr. Wolf is shown as a leader who becomes more responsible; Mr. Snake as doubtful but loyal; Webs as capable and independent; Mr. Shark as humorous and flexible; Mr. Piranha as expressive and devoted to his friends; Professor Marmalade as deceptive; and Diane Foxington as compassionate and willing to change. The examples also show that a character's words may align with their behavior or conceal their actual motives. The article concludes that speech and actions work together to reveal personality and that the characters' contrasting choices contribute to the film's themes of friendship, trust, redemption, and personal growth.</i>

1. Introduction

Characterization helps an audience make sense of a story by showing what its characters value, how they respond to problems, and how they change. In film, these qualities emerge through dialogue and behavior as well as through performance and interaction. Pierre Perifel's animated film *The Bad Guys* (2022) follows a group of animal criminals whose attempt to change their reputation leads them to reconsider the way they live. The choices they make and the conflicts they face offer a useful basis for examining how the film presents personality and change.

Murphy (1972) identifies nine ways in which a character may be presented: personal description, character as seen by another, speech, past life, conversation of others, reactions, direct comment, thoughts, and mannerisms. These categories help a researcher connect a character's traits to evidence in the work. The present analysis concentrates on speech and actions. Dialogue can reveal what a character believes or intends, while behavior shows how those beliefs hold up when the character faces a difficult situation. Considering both forms of evidence is especially relevant to film, where meaning is conveyed verbally and visually.

Research on screen narratives has used characterization to explain how personalities are conveyed and developed. Nisah, Kuncara, and Valiantien (2023) discussed Nina Sayers in *Black Swan*; Febriani and Juniarta (2024) examined Megan Twohey in *She Said*; Pinontoan, Antari, and Pratiwi (2024) studied the main characters in *Hidden Figures*; and Sinaga, Purba, and Syahputra (2024) explored identity formation in *Heartstopper*. Taken together, these studies show how dialogue and conduct can be used to interpret characters. The current article applies Murphy's framework to seven characters in *The Bad Guys* (2022), with particular attention to what they say and do.

This article asks two questions: what personality traits are shown by the main characters in *The Bad Guys* (2022), and how are those traits conveyed through speech and actions when viewed through Murphy's (1972) theory? To answer them, the analysis considers Mr. Wolf, Mr. Snake, Ms. Tarantula (Webs), Mr. Shark, Mr. Piranha, Professor Marmalade, and Governor Diane Foxington. It also considers how their portrayals relate to the film's treatment of friendship, trust, redemption, and personal change.

2. Method

A descriptive qualitative approach was used to examine characterization in *The Bad Guys* (2022), an animated film produced by DreamWorks Animation and directed by Pierre Perifel. The analysis covers seven characters: Mr. Wolf, Mr. Snake, Ms. Tarantula (Webs), Mr. Shark, Mr. Piranha, Professor Marmalade, and Governor Diane Foxington, also known as the Crimson Paw. Supporting sources include books and academic articles on literary analysis, characterization, film, and qualitative research.

The film was viewed more than once, and its English subtitles were consulted while relevant scenes were recorded in notes. The researcher selected dialogue and actions that offered evidence of a character's personality, then grouped the examples by character. Analysis proceeded by identifying the evidence, sorting it into speech or action, interpreting the trait it suggested, relating that interpretation to Murphy's (1972) framework, and drawing conclusions from the patterns. The dialogue examples in the submitted manuscript were retained for this draft. Any timestamps should be checked against the exact film version before they are included.

3. Result

The seven characters are associated with different dominant traits. Table 1 summarizes the interpretation developed from the selected dialogue and behavior; it is not intended to classify every action or scene in the film.

Table 1. Summary of the Characterization of the Main Characters

No.	Character	Dominant Characterization
1	Mr. Wolf	Charismatic, intelligent, confident, responsible, compassionate, and capable of change.
2	Mr. Snake	Cynical, cautious, skeptical, loyal, and increasingly willing to trust his friends.
3	Ms. Tarantula (Webs)	Intelligent, confident, independent, technically skilled, and dependable.
4	Mr. Shark	Humorous, adaptable, friendly, supportive, and loyal.
5	Mr. Piranha	Energetic, emotional, impulsive, humorous, courageous, and loyal.
6	Professor Marmalade	Manipulative, ambitious, dishonest, selfish, and deceptive.
7	Governor Diane Foxington	Confident, intelligent, compassionate, responsible, and committed to redemption.

4. Discussion

Murphy's (1972) framework provides a way to read characterization through observable evidence. What a character says may reveal a belief or intention, while the character's actions can support that message or expose a contradiction. The discussion below examines each character separately and connects the examples to the traits summarized in Table 1.

Mr. Wolf

As the group's leader and the film's protagonist, Mr. Wolf is initially confident, charismatic, and clever. Over time, he also becomes more compassionate and responsible. At first, he takes pride in the gang's criminal reputation; however, helping an elderly woman gives him a different perspective on doing good. That experience begins a shift in his priorities, and he increasingly tries to change his own behavior while looking out for his teammates.

Mr. Wolf states, "I want people to think of us as good guys."

By saying this, Mr. Wolf makes clear that he wants the public to see the gang differently. Speech, in Murphy's (1972) framework, gives direct evidence of that intention. His conduct adds weight to the statement: he helps others, stands by his teammates when they are in danger, and takes risks to reveal Marmalade's wrongdoing. The match between his stated goal and his later choices presents him as a character who develops toward greater responsibility and redemption.

Mr. Snake

Mr. Snake is often skeptical, guarded, and distrustful. As Mr. Wolf's close friend, he questions whether a person with a criminal past can genuinely change and expects society to keep judging the gang by its reputation. His doubts become a source of conflict when Mr. Wolf starts considering a different way of life.

Mr. Snake states, "People don't change."

The line captures Mr. Snake's pessimism about personal change. Yet his behavior shows a more complicated side: despite his doubts, he remains attached to his friends and eventually returns to help them confront Marmalade. His characterization therefore

combines distrust with loyalty. The contrast between his words and choices suggests that skepticism does not prevent him from acting in support of the group.

Ms. Tarantula (Webs)

Webs, or Ms. Tarantula, stands out for her intelligence, independence, confidence, and technical ability. As the gang's hacker, she deals with security systems and other technological obstacles. She is generally composed when a plan becomes difficult, and her quick responses make her a capable and reliable teammate.

Ms. Tarantula says, "I'm in."

Although the utterance is short, it signals that Webs is ready to take on the task. Her work during the gang's operations supports that impression: she applies her technical knowledge to get past obstacles and continues helping the others when the situation becomes risky. Both her words and actions portray her as capable, self-reliant, and cooperative.

Mr. Shark

Mr. Shark combines a humorous manner with flexibility, friendliness, and loyalty. His size may make him appear threatening, but his interactions with the group are often gentle and comic. His talent for disguises also gives him a practical role in carrying out the gang's plans.

Mr. Shark states, "I can do disguises."

Mr. Shark's line shows that he recognizes disguising as one of his strengths. He then puts that skill to use during the gang's operations and works alongside the others, reinforcing the impression that he is adaptable and dependable. The difference between his imposing appearance and his friendly conduct also cautions against judging personality from appearance alone.

Mr. Piranha

Mr. Piranha is lively, expressive, and prone to emotional or impulsive reactions. His dramatic responses often provide humor, particularly when the group faces pressure. At the same time, he does not abandon his teammates when their plans become dangerous, and his willingness to remain involved shows how strongly he is committed to them.

Mr. Piranha says, "I get nervous!"

Mr. Piranha openly admits that he gets nervous, making his fear clear rather than hiding it. His reactions support the description of him as emotional and impulsive, but he continues to take part in the group's efforts even when he feels uneasy. The example suggests that courage can mean acting alongside others despite fear, rather than never feeling afraid.

Professor Marmalade

Marmalade initially appears to be a respected philanthropist who promotes goodness. As the story unfolds, that public image is exposed as a cover for ambition, selfishness, and dishonesty. He manipulates the people who trust him and tries to preserve his reputation by misleading the public and directing suspicion toward the Bad Guys.

Professor Marmalade states, "Goodness is a choice."

On its own, Marmalade's statement sounds like a moral lesson. His conduct, however, undermines the principle he claims to support: he deceives the public, uses the gang for his own purposes, and exploits others to advance his plan. The gap between his words and actions reveals his dishonesty. In this respect, he contrasts with Mr. Wolf, whose growing effort to change is increasingly reflected in his behavior.

Governor Diane Foxington (The Crimson Paw)

Diane Foxington is first introduced as a capable and respected governor. The later revelation that she once operated as the thief known as the Crimson Paw adds another dimension to her character. Because she has a criminal past herself, she understands that people can make different choices and move away from earlier behavior. She is portrayed as intelligent, confident, compassionate, and willing to accept responsibility.

Governor Foxington says, "It's never too late to change."

Foxington's words express faith in the possibility of change, and her behavior gives that belief credibility. She protects people, helps the Bad Guys as they try to reform, and risks her public standing to expose Marmalade. Rather than relying on reputation alone, she demonstrates change through decisions and actions. Her role also helps Mr. Wolf see that redemption requires sustained ethical choices.

Synthesis of Findings

Across the seven portrayals, dialogue offers clues to what characters believe, while their actions show whether those beliefs are sincere or consistent. Mr. Wolf and Foxington demonstrate change through responsible choices. Mr. Snake remains doubtful but proves loyal, and Webs, Shark, and Piranha each support the group in different ways. Marmalade, by contrast, uses moral language to disguise self-serving behavior. These patterns are consistent with Murphy's (1972) emphasis on speech and actions as evidence for characterization, and they support the film's themes of friendship, trust, redemption, and personal change.

5. Conclusion

Using Murphy's (1972) theory, this study examined seven major characters in *The Bad Guys* (2022), focusing on their speech and actions. The analysis presents Mr. Wolf as a confident leader who grows more compassionate and responsible; Mr. Snake as skeptical yet loyal; Webs as intelligent and independent; Mr. Shark as humorous and adaptable; Mr. Piranha as emotional but devoted to his friends; Marmalade as manipulative and dishonest; and Diane Foxington as confident, compassionate, and committed to change. The examples show that dialogue and behavior need to be considered together, particularly when a character's conduct does not match the image presented through words.

The findings suggest that Murphy's framework can help explain how an animated film builds its characters through speech and behavior. The characters' different responses to change also shape the film's exploration of friendship, trust, redemption, and personal growth. This article examines only two of Murphy's nine methods, so it does not provide a complete account of characterization in the film. Further research could consider the other methods, compare *The Bad Guys* with other animated films, or investigate its moral themes through another theoretical lens.

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