



## PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOLESCENCE AND THEIR SCHOLARLY INTERPRETATION

<https://doi.org/10.57033/mijournals-2026-3-0102>

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Received: 15-03-2026

Accepted: 28-03-2026

Published: 13-04-2026



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**Abstract.** *This section is devoted to the psychological characteristics of adolescence and their scholarly interpretation. The article analyzes the principal theoretical approaches to the study of adolescence in world psychology and Uzbek psychology. The following frameworks are examined: S. Hall's «storm and stress» theory; J. Piaget's stages of cognitive development; E. Erikson's concept of psychosocial identity crisis; L. Kohlberg's theory of moral development; the humanistic psychology of C. Rogers and A. Maslow; A. Bandura's social learning theory; and U. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. In addition, the characteristics of adolescence in the national context are highlighted on the basis of research by Uzbek psychologists V. Karimova, B. Qodirov, and Z. Nishonova. The article serves as the theoretical foundation for the study of adolescent psychology in literary education and provides the scholarly basis necessary for the psychological analysis of adolescent characters in literary works.*

**Keywords:** *Adolescence, psychological characteristics, identity crisis, cognitive development, moral consciousness, self-awareness, reflection, social learning, humanistic psychology, literary education.*

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is one of the most complex, contradictory, and at the same time most formative stages of human life. In the science of psychology, this period has been studied by numerous researchers, and its various aspects, characteristics, and patterns have been identified. A scientifically sound understanding of adolescence constitutes the theoretical foundation for the study of adolescent psychology in literary education. During this period, a person's physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development proceeds at an accelerated pace; the adolescent searches for a new identity, and the process of self-awareness intensifies.

The American psychologist Stanley Hall (1844–1924) is regarded as the founder of the scientific study of adolescence. He characterized adolescence as a period of «storm and stress.» In his view, «during this period the emotional state of the adolescent is extremely unstable, and he or she experiences frequent mood swings» (Hall, 1904:xiii). Hall considered adolescence to be the individual recapitulation of the «savage» era in humanity’s evolutionary development. This idea was grounded in the recapitulation theory, according to which every human being re-experiences the principal stages of human history in the course of individual development.

Although Hall’s theory attracted considerable attention in its day, it was subsequently subjected to criticism. As Rice has noted, «the complexity of adolescence is related not only to biological but also to socio-cultural factors» (Rice, 2000:45). Cross-cultural research has demonstrated that adolescence proceeds differently in different cultures – in certain traditional societies, this period passes relatively calmly, without a «storm.» This fact refutes Hall’s biological determinism and confirms the dependence of adolescence on socio-cultural context.

## **MAIN PART**

The Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980) developed a theory of cognitive development and emphasized that adolescence marks the transition to the stage of formal operations. According to his teaching, «at this stage the adolescent acquires the capacity for abstract thinking and attains the ability to engage in hypothetical reasoning and logical inference» (Piaget, 1994:234). According to Piaget’s theory, the adolescent is now capable of thinking not only about concrete objects and phenomena but also about abstract ideas, values, and ideals.

In characterizing the stage of formal operations, Piaget highlighted the following important aspects: first, the adolescent acquires combinatorial thinking – he or she can consider all possible combinations when approaching a problem; second, proportional reasoning develops – the adolescent understands ratios and magnitudes; third, hypothetico-deductive thinking takes shape – the adolescent is able to formulate hypotheses and test them (Piaget, 1950:156). These cognitive changes fundamentally transform the adolescent’s worldview, enabling him or her to reflect on philosophical questions and to subject existing social arrangements to critical scrutiny.

The American psychologist Erik Erikson (1902–1994) defined adolescence, within his theory of psychosocial development, as the stage of «identity formation versus role diffusion.» In Erikson’s view, «during this period the adolescent searches for his or her identity – that is, seeks answers to questions such as ‘Who am I?’, ‘What is my place in life?’, and ‘Who will I become in the future?’» (Erikson, 2006:128). The identity crisis is the central problem of adolescence, and whether or not it is successfully resolved exerts a powerful influence on subsequent life.

Erikson identified two possible outcomes of identity formation: successful identity and role diffusion. When identity is successfully formed, the adolescent acquires the virtue of «fidelity» – the capacity to remain loyal to his or her own values and beliefs (Erikson, 1968:92). In the state of role diffusion, by contrast, the adolescent is unable to find his or her place, drifts between different roles, and cannot define life goals. This condition may subsequently lead to personal and professional difficulties.

Moral consciousness and self-regulation also develop during adolescence. According to Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, «during adolescence the transition from the conventional to the post-conventional level may begin – that is, the adolescent becomes capable of understanding moral norms as universal values» (Kohlberg, 2003:214). The adolescent thinks deeply about such concepts as justice, freedom, and respect, and evaluates existing social arrangements from a moral standpoint.

Kohlberg distinguished six stages of moral development; adolescence typically involves progression to stages three and four. At stage three, the «good boy/nice girl» orientation predominates – the adolescent seeks approval from others. At stage four, the «law and order» orientation takes shape – the adolescent understands the necessity of adhering to social rules (Kohlberg, 1981:178). Some adolescents may also progress to stage five, at which the concept of the «social contract» is comprehended.

Self-awareness develops intensively during adolescence. As Karimova has noted, «the adolescent begins to pay attention to his or her inner world – to feelings, thoughts, and desires – and strives to analyze the self and to understand the causes of his or her own behavior» (Karimova, 2012:178). Reflection is an important psychological novelty of adolescence. Through reflection, the adolescent gains the capacity not only for deeper self-understanding but also for a deeper understanding of others.

Karimova has identified the following components of self-awareness: self-knowledge (awareness of one’s own characteristics); self-evaluation (assessing one’s

own characteristics); and self-regulation (managing one's own behavior) (Karimova, 2014:134). All of these components develop intensively during adolescence, but the balance among them is not always maintained – for instance, an adolescent may know himself or herself well and yet encounter difficulties in regulating his or her own behavior.

Another important characteristic of adolescence is the emergence of romantic feelings. As Qodirov has noted, «the adolescent may experience first love, which occupies a significant place in his or her emotional life» (Qodirov, 2007:89). Romantic relationships help the adolescent in developing self-awareness, forming gender identity, and accumulating experience in interpersonal relations. First love is frequently idealized and emotionally intense.

Representatives of humanistic psychology have also paid particular attention to adolescence. As Rogers noted, «every person, including the adolescent, has a need for self-actualization – for the realization of his or her own potential» (Rogers, 1994:234). This approach emphasizes the importance of respecting the individual characteristics of the adolescent and of supporting his or her self-development.

Rogers introduced the concepts of «conditional positive regard» and «unconditional positive regard.» In his view, «the adolescent frequently encounters conditional positive regard – that is, others respond positively to him or her only when certain conditions are met» (Rogers, 1969:167). This has a negative effect on the adolescent's self-acceptance. Unconditional positive regard, by contrast, involves accepting the adolescent as he or she is and recognizing his or her inherent worth.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, «during adolescence the need for esteem (self-esteem and esteem from others) and the need for self-actualization become activated» (Maslow, 2008:156). The adolescent wants his or her value and significance to be recognized and seeks opportunities to display his or her abilities.

In describing the characteristics of the self-actualizing person, Maslow emphasized their creativity, independence, and loyalty to their own values. In his view, «during adolescence the need for self-actualization begins to awaken, but for it to be fully expressed, the lower-level needs must already be satisfied» (Maslow, 1968:89). This idea highlights the importance of satisfying the adolescent's basic needs – physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem.

Albert Bandura's social learning theory is also of significant importance for understanding adolescence. As Bandura has noted, «the adolescent learns social behavior through observation and imitation» (Bandura, 2000:167). His concept of «self-efficacy» characterizes the degree of the adolescent's confidence in his or her own abilities. High self-efficacy motivates the adolescent to overcome difficulties and to pursue his or her goals.

Bandura also emphasized the importance of the modeling process during adolescence. In his view, «the adolescent observes persons important to him or her – parents, teachers, public figures, peers – and imitates their behavior» (Bandura, 1986:234). This idea underscores the importance of positive role models for adolescents.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory examines adolescence within a broad social context. In his view, «adolescent development is influenced by several levels of systems: the microsystem (family, school), the mesosystem (connections between systems), the exosystem (parents' workplace), and the macrosystem (culture, laws)» (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:145). This theory helps to understand the complex system of factors influencing adolescent development.

Robert Havighurst developed the concept of «developmental tasks» and defined the specific tasks of adolescence. In his view, «at each age period the individual must fulfill certain developmental tasks» (Havighurst, 1972:78). The principal developmental tasks of adolescence include: establishing new, more mature relationships with peers of both sexes; achieving a masculine or feminine social role; accepting one's physique; achieving emotional independence from parents; preparing for economic independence; selecting and preparing for an occupation; preparing for marriage and family life; developing civic competence and social responsibility; and forming an ethical system and value framework that guides behavior.

Uzbek psychologists have also researched the problems of adolescence. Nishonova, having studied the psychological characteristics of Uzbek adolescents, concluded that «national culture and traditions exert a perceptible influence on the development of the adolescent» (Nishonova, 2012:167). The parenting style prevalent in Uzbek families, family values, and social expectations exert a distinctive influence on the adolescent's process of identity formation.

Contemporary researchers are drawing attention to the lengthening of adolescence. Arnett has introduced the concept of «emerging adulthood» and identified the period

between the ages of 18 and 25 as a distinct phase situated between adolescence and full adulthood (Arnett, 2014:89). In contemporary society, the lengthening of the period of education, the rise in the age of marriage, and the delayed achievement of economic independence are among the causes of this phenomenon of «prolonged adolescence.»

Steinberg has highlighted the distinctive characteristics of brain development during adolescence. According to neuroscience research, «during adolescence the prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and the consideration of consequences – is not yet fully developed» (Steinberg, 2017:156). This fact provides a biological explanation for the impulsive behavior and risk-taking tendencies of adolescents.

## **CONCLUSION**

A deep understanding of the psychological characteristics of adolescence is of great importance for literary education. Knowledge of these psychological patterns is necessary for analyzing the adolescent characters depicted in literary works. The literature teacher must take into account the psychological characteristics of adolescent students when conducting lessons, and apply methods appropriate to their emotional and intellectual capacities.

The psychological theories and patterns presented above serve as an important theoretical basis for analyzing the adolescent characters in the stories «Hellados» and «Do'nan.» Hall's «storm and stress» theory, Piaget's stages of cognitive development, Erikson's concept of identity crisis, Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach, and Kohlberg's stages of moral development are all theoretical instruments necessary for understanding the behavior and inner world of adolescent protagonists in literary works.

Adolescence is a distinctive, complex, and contradictory stage of human life in which a number of important processes of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development unfold. The principal psychological characteristics of adolescence – identity seeking, a sense of adulthood, the primacy of peer relationships, emotional instability, the development of abstract thinking, the formation of the capacity for reflection, the development of moral consciousness, the emergence of romantic feelings, and the aspiration toward self-actualization – are important factors that must be taken into account in creating and analyzing adolescent characters in literary works. The

theories, concepts, and empirical research developed by psychologists in Uzbekistan and throughout the world constitute the scholarly basis necessary for a deep understanding of the psychology of adolescence.

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