Character Creation

Brainstorming for character creation

This handout contains indicators meant to help you brainstorm the character creation process. It is by no means extensive or complete, and there is no right or wrong way to go about it! Do whatever feels right for you, your writing style, and your creative process.

Your **characters are your friends**. You know them like the back of your hand and spend a lot of time with them. You want them to become other people's friends. You want others to be able to know and understand your character(s) as much as you do. They need to be believable, relatable, and humane by giving them **complexity similar to humans**, allowing them to be flawed and vulnerable, and to give them personal inner conflicts within the larger conflict of the story.

Here are some things to give your character…

- **A goal (purpose).** Why this goal? Do they have other desires? What do they want? What obstacles are in their way (tension)? What will happen if they fail (stakes)?
- **Strengths and Flaws.** Fears? Temptations? Weaknesses? Strengths and flaws are often complimentary (a great speaker is often a terrible listener). How do these help them or hinder them in achieving their goal?
- **Context.** Backstory? Where are they situated in the world you are bringing to life? How do they fit into it, or don't?
- **Personality.** Quirks, character traits, interests? Introvert or extrovert? What do they enjoy doing? Brave, stubborn, kind? (This is everything that is *inward*)
- **External features.** Where do they live? What do they wear? Appearance? How do they treat other people? How do other people see them? (This is everything that is *outward*)
- **Secrets.** What do they keep hidden? What are they afraid of others knowing? Why?
- **Languages.** How do they express themselves? What is their body language? Are they touchy or cold? What do they sound like? What will the reader hear when they speak?

A goal gives your character a **purpose**. This is the reason why they *do* anything. The answer to the question, *what is in their way*, creates **tension**. Without tension, there would be no story. The story is them working through that tension to meet their end goal (the character arc). The answer to the question, *what will happen if they fail*, creates **stakes**. This gives a sense of urgency, a real need to achieve their primary goal and purpose. Characters can have several smaller goals as well, but one main goal helps clarify the character both to the reader and to yourself.

You could also associate your character with **archetypes or symbols** (not stereotypes!). Readers are already familiar with their meanings, so they will quickly catch on to the gist of your character (example: associating a character with a snake). From there, you can flesh out your character and give them depth, making them unique and authentic.

These elements also help to put yourself in your character's head…

- **How do they define themselves** in their own story?
- **What is their perspective** on life (influenced by prior development you've done), their attitude? Hopeful? Cynical?
- **Whom do they surround themselves with**? Their choices tell us who they are.
- **Where do they seek refuge**? Where are they safe? Do they have mentor figures?
- **Do they want redemption or glory**? How they are shaped by the story they have lived through, and how does it affect their quest? How does it affect their current journey?
- **How do they think**? What are their personal internal and external conflicts? How do they handle them? What is their psychology or spirituality?

Everyone has different writing and creation styles. Here, I outline two: **discovering your characters as you write about them; or planning the character out fully before writing about them**.

In the first method, you write by process of discovery. Put an interesting character in a rough situation and see what happens: where do they fall short? How do they develop on their own?

The second method is planning and research based (research will be part of the first method too). Understanding your character fully will help you put yourself in their shoes. Well-researched characters are also more relatable. For example, when writing a character who has survived a traumatic incident, you may need to research the impacts trauma has on daily life and how this shapes the character.

You can also blend the two methods together and see which works best for your style and for individual characters.

Have fun creating characters! It's all about enjoying the process and genuinely investing yourself in who they are, and why. And remember – use whatever creative process works best for you!