

Week 4: Protagonist, Antagonist, Hero, Anti-Hero, Supporting Characters: The WHO of your story.

Reading:

<http://wisdomhomeschooling.com/images/courses/creativewriting/characterization.pdf>

The Main Character

Your main character is wilful. He has a conscious desire (something he wants and knows he wants). He may also have a contradictory, unconscious desire (something he wants but does not know he wants). He must have the ability to pursue his desire convincingly. He must also have a chance to attain the desire (but he might not necessarily attain it). He has the will and ability to pursue the desire to its end.

Characterization

Characterization means character traits or personality you give your character. They often help him pursue the goal (for example: age, strength, worldliness, naiveté). These traits make your character credible to the reader, who must believe that the character *can* do what he *does* do. These traits flesh out your character: age, IQ, woman or man, style of speech and gesture, choice of car, home, clothing, education, occupation, personality, values, attitudes.

TRUE Character

“Character is who you are in the dark.” True character what you do when you think no one is listening. True character is also revealed in choices made under pressure. The greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation. What does your character really feel? What does your character really want?

Fine writing not only reveals true character, but arcs or changes that inner nature, for better or worse, over the course of the telling. The structure of story will provide progressively building pressures as you work from the beginning and the catalyst/inciting incident towards the climax. There will be more difficult dilemmas, riskier choices and actions: gradually true character will be revealed even down to the unconscious self.

The Three Levels of Conflict

1. **Man vs. Society, Man vs. Nature, Man vs. Unknown, Man vs. God:** Extra-personal conflicts.

John is hiking in a ravine. Suddenly, a storm begins and breaks loose a dam at the far end of the ravine. The whole place begins to flood. John runs for his life, the rising water close behind him. Then he finds himself at a dead end with a sheer rock face before him. There's nothing for it—the only way to escape is to climb. But the water has made the stones slippery, the gravel is loose, and the climb is very steep. But if John does not climb, he will be drowned!

2. **Man vs. Man:** Inter-personal conflicts. These are the most common types of conflicts.

An evil villain has kidnapped John's sweetheart and holds her captive on the top of a cliff. John boldly begins climbing the rock face in order to save her. But the villain whips out a pistol and begins shooting at John as he climbs, wanting to stop him at all costs. John dodges the shots. When he finally reaches the head of the cliff, the villain grabs his wrists and starts trying to fling him off the face of the rock. John struggles to get free and...

3. **Man vs. Himself:** Inner conflict. (Unless your character has a psychological disorder, it is most effective for you as a writer to externalize that conflict somehow.) John is a soldier and must climb the rock face in order to pass basic training. But he has a deep-seated fear of heights. He has done all he can to cure himself of this fear—taken climbing lessons, talked it over with people he loves, told himself it is

silly. But when the moment of crisis comes, he doubts his ability to overcome his fear and tackle the climb. How does he deal with this internal struggle?

In-class exercise: Everyone gets a sheet of paper and free writes for 10 minutes, answering questions about their characters.

A Few Last Notes

Empathy is absolute; sympathy is optional. Neither you nor your audience have to *like* your characters, but you have to understand them.

There's only one person you ever really know: yourself. Ask yourself: "If I were this character in this situation, what would I do?"

Discover your characters' dreams, fears, strengths, weaknesses. Then, knowing his aspects and potential, create an event geared to his unique nature: the catalyst or inciting incident. (More about this next class!)

Homework

Write a list of the main characters and main supporting characters of your story, and write character sketches for each. Your character sketches should give a physical description of your character, an idea of their personality, and describe how they change from beginning to end of the story. Aim for at least one page double spaced.