

Title of Session: Character Development

Creator: Janet Beasley

Curriculum: NOVICE

Definition:

Character development is an important factor in any genre. Regardless of your character – good, bad, in different, true to life, immortal, elvin, animal, etc. – he/she must develop a personality, possess quirks and flaws, and be able to act or react “in character” whenever they appear in your story.

Character development is the process in which authors, in this case, use certain elements to bring a character to life. A character’s attitude, actions, reactions, mannerisms, hair style, and clothing are a few of the things that can be used to develop a character. Where a character lives also says a lot about a character i.e. Living in the mountains, at the beach, in the ice lands, etc. can add to the character’s development through regional aspects, climate, clothing, and hobbies.

Goals: By the end of the session enthusiasts will be able to identify key elements that will aid in building their characters.

Tools:

- 3 x 5 cards
- Sharpies
- Flipchart or wipe off board / markers

The list below is an “idea” list only. All items listed below are NOT mandatory – simply choose the items you want, or you are welcome to make up your own list. The more items you have, the more fun the Ice Breaker will be.

- Different style hats (2-3)
- Packs of gum - different flavors (2-3)
- Keys (on a ring, skeleton key)
- A magic wand
- Stuffed animals (2-3 dog, cat, horse)
- Different style sun glasses (2-3)
- Scarves (2-3)
- Different pairs of socks (2-3 pair)
- Gloves
- Marbles
- Rope
- Musical instruments (2-3 harmonica, flutophone, Jew’s harp – small ones)
- Rocks
- Rubber bugs
- Rubber snakes
- Rubber frogs

- Rubber dinosaurs
- Hair spray
- Hair gel
- Headband
- Barrett
- Wigs
- Flowers
- Fruit (2-3 different kinds)
- Rings
- Necklaces
- Different shirts (2-3)
- Nail polish
- Make-up
- Kleenex
- Toilet paper
- Pens, pencils, crayons, markers (frilly, plain, big, small, etc)
- Jars of glitter (2-3 different colors)

Ice Breaker:

- Gather around a large table or in a circle on the floor
- Place items from the list of Tools on the large table, or the floor
- Encourage enthusiasts to pick at least 3 items they find intriguing but are welcome to select more
- If they chose something that can be worn have them put it on i.e. hat, wig, shirt
- Have the enthusiasts arrange all other items in plain view in front of them
- Have them come up with a character name and write it on a 3 x 5 card with a Sharpie for easy reading, then have them place their character name card in front of them for all to see
- Start with one enthusiast, and have them greet the others “in character” using mannerisms, facial expressions, etc.
- Other enthusiasts should then present their ideas of what type character they believe him/her to be by observing their character name, mannerisms, and looking at the items they are wearing and/or chose.
- Continue the ice breaker with each enthusiast

The goal of this ice breaker exercise is to show how character development can come from more than just personality, attitude, and action.

Activity 1: Types of characters and character arc

On your flip chart or wipe off board list the bullet points and discuss:

- **Protagonist** – the main character whom the story revolves around

- **Antagonist** – the opposition to your main character who continually deals out obstacles (to the protagonist or those they are close to) to prevent your protagonist from reaching his/her goal. The best word that describes an antagonist is “obstacle.” The antagonist presents the opposition to the protagonist in efforts to stop the protagonist from reaching his/her goal.
- **Catalyst** – the instigator who promotes action, conflict, or a disruption. Their job is to keep the story moving using action to further accelerate conflict. These guys love to create disturbances in the story’s flow. They can be very annoying.

Character Arc : The process of your character as they change throughout the story

Examples:

Example 1: Let’s say a protagonist is called to save the world by finding a magical rock atop a mountain and taking it deep beneath the water to the king who must shatter the magical rock to start the process, but as of “now” the protagonist doesn’t know how to mountain climb or dive, and he/she has never traveled out of their community. The character arc would be the process of going from being a small town resident to achieving the goal of getting the magical rock to the king underwater. Through this process they will face obstacles galore, but these obstacles will strengthen the character and possibly a catalyst will get involved during the arc to help the “saver of the world” continue to grow in bravery, gumption, and skill until the goal is reached.

Example 2: Let’s use the antagonist this time. The protagonist has only days to thwart the enemy and rescue their family. The antagonist starts out wicked, brutal, and ruthless. Each time the protagonist conquers the antagonist’s obstacle, the antagonist would begin to soften, and each time the antagonist “sets a trap” he/she begins to change their mind not wanting to kill the protagonist. The antagonist would move from wanting to kill to perhaps only hurting, then from wanting to hurt the protagonist to helping them reach their goal. This character arc example involves taking a character from evil to good.

Activity 2: Frequently asked questions when developing characters

Should I develop my characters before I begin writing my story?

It is always a good idea to have a base of what each character is going to be like. Their height, weight, hair color, eye color, and clothing style are a few of the helpful traits you can assign to any character before you begin your story to begin building their base.

Don’t be surprised if your characters begin to change, or certain mannerisms begin to escalate as you’re writing.

Is there anything to avoid when developing a protagonist?

Your protagonist must come across “real” to your readers whether they are fictional or not. You need to make bad things happen to them, dish out some flaws such as quirky reactions – beautiful hair color but it is unruly – idiosyncrasies – etc. (nobody’s perfect – even in a fantasy world).

Should I kill my protagonist?

If it “has to be” to make the story, there is no law saying you can’t. Depending on their character and how they’re going to die, they could end up in a brutal death brought about by the antagonist, or they could pass away peacefully at the end of their long life.

Should an antagonist always die a cruel death?

Not necessarily. As discussed in character arcs they may fool you and turn good. Granted they may still need to die to complete the story, but in this case their death could be non-violent.

Should an antagonist always deliver a violent death to others?

This is going to depend on your antagonist’s character development. They may go from slaughtering people to pushing them off cliffs into burning tar pits. If they are making their way through their arc to good, the killings will most likely stop but perhaps an accidental death to someone will happen that seems brutal...but not on purpose.

Should the “good guy” always win?

Not at all. Character development can lead to bringing about a victory for the antagonist. This is a technique often used when writing a series – if the first “good guy” dies, who’s going to take their place? Who knows, the antagonist may take over for a few volumes in the series and the original protagonist may resurface in the last volume and “save the day.”

Activity 3:

Have students think back on how the others perceived them during the ice breaker. What were the things that led them to believe the character was likeable, despicable, compassionate, kind, ruthless, etc.

On your flip chart or wipe off board write these prompts:

- 1) Justin had no time think about what he should do in his immediate situation, he had to make something happen, and happen now if he wanted to stay alive. As luck would have it the rope snapped and Justin...
- 2) Lydia crouched behind the building. She waited and watched as the man approached her trap. She held her breath when his foot graced the top of the...
- 3) They shouted in celebration as the wolf took off running, but when the twins turned around to continue their journey they were met face to face with a...

Enthusiasts should choose one of the three prompts and begin to build the characters mentioned in the prompts.

- Enthusiasts will need to decide if they want the character in the prompt to be a protagonist, an antagonist, or a catalyst.

- In a few sentences enthusiasts should develop the character in the prompt using things such things as clothing, hair, props, eyes, mannerisms, location, etc.
- When done select a few enthusiasts to read their work aloud and have others decide what kind of character they believe they wrote about.

Discussion:

- What elements of character development do you find most helpful in connecting with a character as a reader?
- Who do you usually like to cheer for and why? The protagonist to reach their goal, or the antagonist who's trying to stop them?
- What is your take on using a "villain" as your protagonist with the antagonist being the "good guy" trying to stop the evil character?

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Handout 1: NOVICE

What is character development?

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What are three basic kinds of characters?

- Protagonist
- Antagonist
- Catalyst

What is a protagonist?

A protagonist is the main character of which the story revolves around.

What is an antagonist?

The opposition to your main character who continually deals out obstacles (to the protagonist or those they are close to) to prevent your protagonist from reaching his/her goal.

The best word that describes an antagonist is “obstacle.” The antagonist presents the opposition to the protagonist in efforts to stop the protagonist from reaching his/her goal.

What is a catalyst?

The catalyst can be thought of as an instigator. Their job is to keep the story moving using action to further accelerate conflict. These guys love to create disturbances in the story’s flow. They can be very annoying.

What is a character arc?

Example 1: Let’s say a protagonist is called to save the world by finding a magical rock atop a mountain and taking it deep beneath the water to the king who must shatter the magical rock to start the process, but as of “now” the protagonist doesn’t know how to mountain climb or dive, and he/she has never traveled out of their community. The character arc would be the process of going from being a small town resident to achieving the goal of getting the magical rock to the king underwater. Through this process they will face obstacles galore, but these obstacles will strengthen the character and possibly a catalyst will get involved during the arc to help the “saver of the world” continue to grow in bravery, gumption, and skill until the goal is reached.

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Handout 2: NOVICE & ADVANCED

Character Development Fact Sheet

Title:

Author:

CHARACTER QUALITIES:

Name:

Nickname:

Person or animal:

Date of birth:

Age :

Eyes:

Hair:

Height:

Build:

Weight:

Family Tree:

Story Role – protagonist, antagonist, catalyst:

Character Arc – trials to triumphs, good to evil or evil to good, learning new powers:

Personality – outgoing, introvert:

Clothing style:

Flaw(s):

Major flaw:

Friends:

Enemies:

Greatest Fear:

Favorite things:

Core Needs:

How does he/she deal with those needs?

How do they solve problems?

Coping Mechanism(s):

Talent(s):

Super power(s):

Secret demon(s):

Secret weapon(s):

Who or what can destroy them:

Background – how did they get to where they are when the story begins:

Misc Notes:

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Activity 1: Types of characters, character arc, and character building factors that incorporate change

On your flip chart or wipe off board list the bullet points and discuss:

- **Protagonist** – the main character whom the story revolves around
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- **Catalyst** – the instigator who promotes action, conflict, or a disruption. Their job is to keep the story moving using action to further accelerate conflict. These guys love to create disturbances in the story’s flow. They can be very annoying.

Other kinds of characters can be found besides a protagonist, an antagonist, and a catalyst:

Add the following bullet points to your list of character types

- **Flat or Static:** These fictional characters do not change or undergo any kind of growth, however at times they can be seen as necessary to the protagonist or antagonist. Flat or static characters are not something authors spend a ton of time on because of the fact they do not need to and normally do not develop.
- **Dynamic or Round:** These fictional characters are major characters, though not necessarily do they have to be your protagonist or antagonist. But keep in mind protagonists and antagonists can be dynamic in their own ways. A stand alone dynamic character will be more fully developed than a flat or static character, and they do encounter conflict and experience a change as a result of the conflict. Character description, dialogue, response to conflict, and thoughts are all ways a dynamic character evolves throughout the story.
- **Stock:** Stock characters are tricky, to say nothing of risky. They are normally developed using a form of stereotypical, cultural characteristics. Unless you really know the culture (and probably well known within the culture) you are taking a high risk as an author of being judged by your readers. You also run the risk of having your readers lose interest in the story because now you have them wondering, who could have possibly given you (the author) the authority to write such “slander” in their eyes.
 - Another example of a stock character who is somewhat at a lesser risk, though at a risk nonetheless (depending on delivery by the author), could be a character whom of which represents an entire group of individuals, not culturally, but rather in a manner that can sometimes come across as demeaning, i.e. the quiet kid who never gets “picked for the team” because...(blah blah blah). It could be a bully, a rich tycoon, a strict prison guard, or possibly a house keeper. When all is said and done, the author needs to have their facts straight regarding these type stock

characters or readers will move from reading the “story” to wondering about the author’s ability of understanding such characters.

- **Foil:** A foil character presents opportunity to your main character(s) for change – better or worse.

Example 1:

- Let’s say you have a protagonist (a mother) who is totally opposed to owning a dog. The foil character (the mother’s best friend) has found out that the daughter wants a dog really bad. The foil character loves dogs and wants the daughter to have one because of all the benefits a dog can bring to a family. The foil character could take the protagonist to the animal shelter to see the sad looks on all of the puppies’ faces in hopes of changing her friend’s heart on the matter.

Example 2:

- Lori is a devout truth teller, she has never lied to her family. Jesse, Lori’s older sister, is an avid liar. Lori gets into a situation that is going to ruin her life if she tells the truth. Jesse sees the opportunity and tries to coax Lori into lying...just this once.

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Examples:

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Who and what are some of the factors of character changes?

- Family
- Friends

- Enemies
- Acquaintances
- People you may not know but still admire and/or respect
- Animals
- Locations (where you live, where you go or went to school, a cemetery, a restaurant)
- Vacations
- Weddings
- Funerals
- Going through the process of adoption
- Receiving the news that you have a chronic or terminal illness

Let's break it down even further. Your personal "character" (or characteristics) as a human being can change: sometimes at the drop of a hat, other times over a period of time. Visible things such as traits, actions, and mannerisms expose your personal "character" (your true self) to your friends, family, and others around you.

Your characteristics, good or bad, are all subject to change. The bulk of your personal "character" lies within your attitude toward your circumstances whether they are exciting, happy, sad, scary, confusing, or mundane. For instance, you may think you're a very patient person. But when you are faced with: having to wait longer than expected for something or someone, listen to other people's kids screaming in public or dancing around your private dinner table, trying to sleep while the neighbor's dog continues to bark well past 3:00 a.m., or the person who is holding the remote is continually changing channels just when the show is getting good – all could become circumstances that "adjust your attitude," and can bring about actions that reveal to you perhaps you are not as patient as you thought you were.

Your characters are no different. They are going to have attitudes, actions, mannerisms, and plenty of opportunity through conflict and circumstances for you to develop them in unique ways. Good guys could become bad guys and vice versa. Regular people could become mutants. The "nice girl next door" could turn out to be a hit-man, while the persona hiring the hit-man could find out they are going after the wrong person and have to deal with thinking how close they came to having an innocent person killed.

Activity 2: Frequently asked questions when developing characters

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Discussion:

- Name several well known characters and their types (protagonist, antagonist, catalyst, flat/static, dynamic/round, foil).
- What characteristic do you think is best when it comes to developing any kind of character and why? (Description, dialogue, thoughts, clothing, where they are from, etc.)
- What do you consider to be your best developed “character” attributes? (Kindness, compassion, honesty, smooth talker, cheat etc.)

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Handout 1: ADVANCED
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The process of your character as they change throughout the story.

Example 1: Let's say a protagonist is called to save the world by finding a magical rock atop a mountain and taking it deep beneath the water to the king who must shatter the magical rock to start the process, but as of "now" the protagonist doesn't know how to mountain climb or dive, and he/she has never traveled out of their community. The character arc would be the process of going from being a small town resident to achieving the goal of getting the magical rock to the king underwater. Through this process they will face obstacles galore, but these obstacles will strengthen the character and possibly a catalyst will get involved during the arc to help the "saver of the world" continue to grow in bravery, gumption, and skill until the goal is reached.

Example 2: Let's use the antagonist this time. The protagonist has only days to thwart the enemy and rescue their family. The antagonist starts out wicked, brutal, and ruthless. Each time the protagonist conquers the antagonist's obstacle, the antagonist would begin to soften, and each time the antagonist "sets a trap" he/she begins to change their mind not wanting to kill the protagonist. The antagonist would move from wanting to kill to perhaps only hurting, then from wanting to hurt the protagonist to helping them reach their goal. This character arc example involves taking a character from evil to good.

Just like yourself, your characters develop over time. Who and what are some of the factors of character changes?

- Family
- Friends
- Enemies
- Acquaintances
- People you may not know but still admire and/or respect
- Animals
- Locations (where you live, where you go or went to school, a cemetery, a restaurant)
- Vacations
- Weddings
- Funerals
- Going through the process of adoption
- Receiving the news that you have a chronic or terminal illness

Let's break it down even further. Your personal "character" (or characteristics) as a human being can change: sometimes at the drop of a hat, other times over a period of time. Visible things such as traits, actions, and mannerisms expose your personal "character" (your true self) to your friends, family, and others around you.

Your characteristics, good or bad, are all subject to change. The bulk of your personal “character” lies within your attitude toward your circumstances whether they are exciting, happy, sad, scary, confusing, or mundane. For instance, you may think you’re a very patient person. But when you are faced with: having to wait longer than expected for something or someone, listen to other people’s kids screaming in public or dancing around your private dinner table, trying to sleep while the neighbor’s dog continues to bark well past 3:00 a.m., or the person who is holding the remote is continually changing channels just when the show is getting good – all could become circumstances that “adjust your attitude,” and can bring about actions that reveal to you perhaps you are not as patient as you thought you were.

Your characters are no different. They are going to have attitudes, actions, mannerisms, and plenty of opportunity through conflict and circumstances for you to develop them in unique ways. Good guys could become bad guys and vice versa. Regular people could become mutants. The “nice girl next door” could turn out to be a hit-man, while the persona hiring the hit-man could find out they are going after the wrong person and have to deal with thinking how close they came to having an innocent person killed.

Should I develop my characters before I begin writing my story?

It is always a good idea to have a base of what each character is going to be like. Their height, weight, hair color, eye color, and clothing style are a few of the helpful traits you can assign to any character before you begin your story to begin building their base.

Don’t be surprised if your characters begin to change, or certain mannerisms begin to escalate as you’re writing.

Is there anything to avoid when developing a protagonist?

Your protagonist must come across “real” to your readers whether they are fictional or not. You need to make bad things happen to them, dish out some flaws such as quirky reactions – beautiful hair color but it is unruly – idiosyncrasies – etc. (nobody’s perfect – even in a fantasy world).

Should I kill my protagonist?

If it “has to be” to make the story, there is no law saying you can’t. Depending on their character and how they’re going to die, they could end up in a brutal death brought about by the antagonist, or they could pass away peacefully at the end of their long life.

Should an antagonist always die a cruel death?

Not necessarily. As discussed in character arcs they may fool you and turn good. Granted they may still need to die to complete the story, but in this case their death could be non-violent.

Should an antagonist always deliver a violent death to others?

This is going to depend on your antagonist’s character development. They may go from slaughtering people to pushing them off cliffs into burning tar pits. If they are making

their way through their arc to good, the killings will most likely stop but perhaps an accidental death to someone will happen that seems brutal...but not on purpose.

Should the “good guy” always win?

Not at all. Character development can lead to bringing about a victory for the antagonist. This is a technique often used when writing a series – if the first “good guy” dies, who’s going to take their place? Who knows, the antagonist may take over for a few volumes in the series and the original protagonist may resurface in the last volume and “save the day.”

(See HANDOUT 2: NOVICE and ADVANCED)