Creative Writing: Character Development

The Center

What is a story without its characters? Many writers tend to focus their attention on what happens in the story (the plot). However, without meaningful characters, readers will have little reason to care about the plot regardless of its exciting action. Character development is crucial because you want your audience to invest their interest not only in what is happening, but in the individuals that make it happen.

Who Are They?

When you begin to formulate the characters for your short story or novel, think about the following:

- What do your characters look like? Help your readers get an idea of their physical features.
- What kind of personalities do your characters have? Help your readers get an idea about their uniqueness as well as their strengths and weaknesses.
- What sort of backgrounds do your characters come from? Help your readers understand their context.

What Are They Doing?

What are your characters doing? What kind of behaviors do your characters possess? This applies not only to the actions that actually take place on the page, but also the implied actions that your audience may think about. If one of your characters is a morning person, the assumption is that he/she wakes up early. How do you write the habits, behaviors, and actions in such a way to where your readers get a sense of your characters’ movements?

Why Are They Doing What They Are Doing?

What motivates your characters to do what they do? What part of the character’s backstory contributes to the actions they execute in your story? Think about your characters as real people (or the beings that you have created from your imagination). You want to write your story in such a way that your readers feel that the characters come from somewhere.
How Are They Doing What They are Doing?

What do your characters use to commit the actions in the short story or novel? Do your characters struggle with the things that they do? Are the actions executed with great effort or with little conscious? How a character acts is internal as much as it is external.

Their Point of View

How do your characters see the world? What are their personal politics, morals, and ethics? What codes do they live by? What are the influences that shape how your characters see themselves and others? Your characters' point of view is just as important as the point of view that you use to write your short story or novel.

When you develop your characters, remember that you want to make them believable. Your audience is taking the time to read your story so make the characters worth their while as much as they are worth to you.

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