

# Introduction to Character

A simple definition of a story is the narrative of a person trying to solve a problem certain place and time. Put another way a story is a three-legged stool with the legs being: character, plot, and setting.

Many people see these as separate and distinct or even in competition with each other. This is not the case. Indeed, like the legs of a stool, if one is missing or weak the entire object will collapse. They interact with each other. One person locked in a cellar by the villain will pretend to be sick and knock the guard out when he comes in to check. Another will concoct an explosive from stuff laying around. And if they were locked in a bedroom instead of a cellar, that would produce an entirely different set of choices.

Most often, though, a plot is created through the choices made by the characters in the story as are allowed by the world of the story. Whether you are writing a tender love story, the dramatic account of someone's world cruise following a diagnosis of terminal disease, or an action-packed zombie apocalypse novel, your characters are the primary driving force of a story.

In this course, you will learn how to create realistic, believable and memorable characters. While we will be covering the externals of a character such as appearance, demographics, job, etc., our emphasis is going to be on growing characters from the inside out.

What does this mean? Specifically, this means learning to become your character, get to know that person so well, that you don't have to think about what he or she will do next. The character will tell you what they are going to do. That is the key to getting inside a character.

We will look at components of character such as motivation, decision-making processes, preferences, emotional responses, fears, regrets, virtues, vices, insecurities, and competencies.

In this course, I want you to choose two characters from a story you are writing, have written, or will write. I want them to be major characters that appear in more than just a few scenes. They can be the protagonist and antagonist or partners. It doesn't matter. You will use those characters for all of the character building exercises unless you are otherwise instructed. By the end of this course, you will know those characters so well that if one called you on the phone, you would recognize their voice.

If you can find it, a good preparation for this course is the Will Ferrill movie *Stranger than Fiction* in which one of a novelist's characters becomes real and aware that he is a character being written.

Meanwhile, the assignment for this lesson is to choose two characters from popular fiction, movies or television that are personal favorites.