

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT WORKBOOK

Develop a Main Character Readers Love

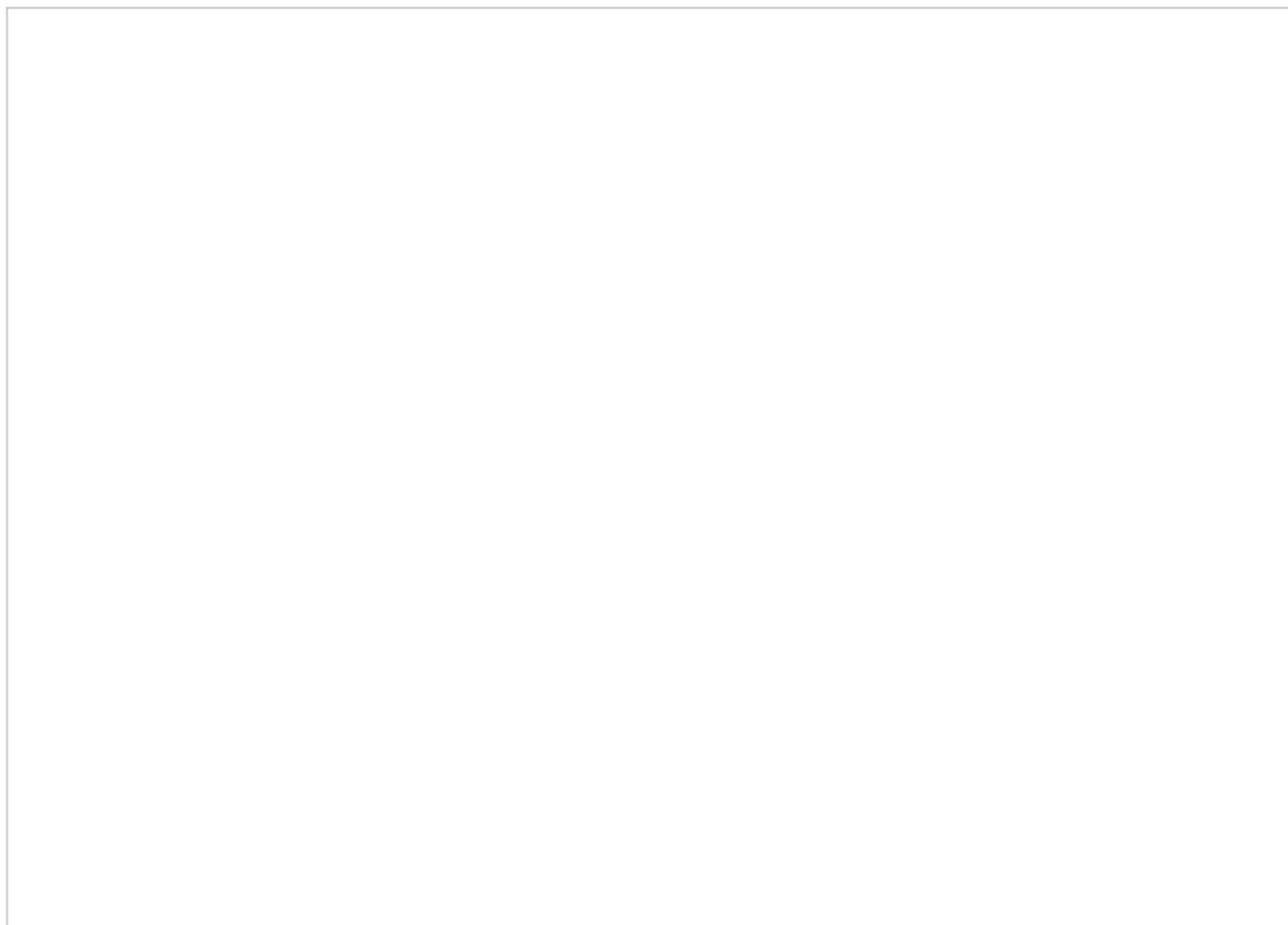
Kim Purcell

Readers keep reading because they connect with the main character. Use these prompts to create a protagonist who immediately pulls readers in and makes them care from page one. (For memoir, use these prompts for yourself and the people you knew.)

Draw Your Character

Character name: _____

Draw your character. Give them clothes they would wear. Let them whisper to you as you draw, and write what they say around the drawing. Stick figures are welcome.



Embodying Your Character

Draw a line from each corresponding body part and then answer the questions for that body part.

Any body part: Do they have any insecurities? Is there anything they love? Do they have any unusual body parts, like six toes?

Scars: What are their memories associated with their scars, physical and emotional?

Legs/Feet: What sports/exercise do they do? Why? How do they walk? Fast or slow? Aggressive or cautious? Why? Do they jiggle their feet or knees when nervous?

Hips: What do they yearn for? What is their deeper ambition?

Belly: What are they afraid of? Why? What makes them angry? Why? What do they believe in their gut to be true about people or themselves?

Heart: What do they love? Who do they love? Have they experienced heartbreak?

Arms/Hands: What physical skills do they have? How did they learn those skills? What do they do with their hands when they're nervous?

Throat/Neck: What is their secret? What are they afraid to say?

Mouth/Tongue: What expressions do they choose? How do they talk? How do they kiss? What do they eat? How do they eat? What is their appetite? Do they have any food allergies?

Nose: What are their favorite smells? What's their least favorite? Why?

Ears: What music do they like? Why? What sounds bug them? Why?

Brain: Do they have any neurodivergences? Do they have mental health issues? Do they have ADHD, ASD, dyslexia, bipolar disorder, migraines, or anxiety? What do they think about?

Top of the head: What do they know a lot about? What is their religion? What are their beliefs? What are their superstitions?

CHARACTER STRUGGLE: TRAUMA, FEARS, MISBELIEF, LONGING

What is a terrible experience from their past? How would they tell a therapist about it: with humor, self-deprecation, anger, or silence?

Because of that experience, what do they believe about the world?

How does that belief help them? How does it cause trouble?

What do they long for, even if they would never admit it?

What secret creates turmoil within them?

What do they hope will not happen? What are they trying to stop themselves from doing?

What insecurity or fear resulted from this trauma?

See Their World Through Their Eyes

A place can carry a memory and change how a person behaves. Draw a map or floor plan

Where do they live, sleep, shop, or avoid going? Which places feel dangerous?

What is their favorite and least favorite place at home? What rules belong to that place?

Which location holds a hard memory? How does that memory affect the present scene?

Draw Your Memory Map

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for drawing a memory map. It occupies the central portion of the page.

CHARACTER VOICE

Ask Your Character The Questions ... Listen to How They Talk

(Answer in the main character's voice with their word choice, rhythm, and humor.)

Desire: What do you want right now?

Secrets: What are you trying to hide or protect?

Opinions: What do you think of your best friend? Your mom? Your sister? Your boss?

Pet Peeve: What is your biggest pet peeve? What annoys you? Why?

Values: What is one thing you would never do? Why?

Choose One Other Key Character

Choose an ally, antagonist, friend, relative, or rival.

What does your protagonist think about this person? What does this person want?

Who has power in this relationship and how can you show that power?

What does the other character know, hide, want or fear that differs from the main character?

What do they refuse to discuss? What is the lie or secret beneath their dialogue?

For your next scene between the two of them, how could a warning, threat, or argument about a smaller issue reveal the deeper problem?

Make Character Cause Plot

Choose one scene. Let their actions and dialogue reveal their history. Allow the reader to wonder.

What does the character want to get, avoid, find, or do in this scene? What does someone else want?

How do they feel entering the scene, and what just happened?

What is the conflict, and which fear or belief makes it harder?

What mistake do they make? What dilemma must they face?

What are the stakes if they make the wrong choice?

What decision do they make, and what happens because of it?

FOUR ACT PLOT STRUCTURE

The Busy Writer Plot

Four acts and 22 plot points, with the character movement in each act.

Act One

The old life exposes a yearning. A disruption gives the character a goal.

- 01 The Imperfect Life
- 02 The Inciting Incident
- 03 First Response
- 04 The New Goal

Act Two

The character tests strengths and gains confidence before a shock.

- 05 New World and Allies
- 06 The Antagonist Threatens
- 07 Skills and Information
- 08 Subplot Challenge
- 09 Escalating Obstacles
- 10 False Hope
- 11 The Midpoint Shock

Act Three

Pressure brings out the old flaw. A flawed choice leads to the lowest point.

- 12 Reaction to the Midpoint
- 13 The Fuse
- 14 Flawed Plan
- 15 Subplot Complications
- 16 A Near Win
- 17 The Big Mistake
- 18 The All-Is-Lost Moment

Act Four

A realization changes the approach. The final test reveals what has changed.

- 19 The Lightbulb Moment
- 20 The Climax
- 21 Aftermath
- 22 The Ending

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