

Getting To Know Your Character

Writing a story is archaeology. Not all of these details will make it to the page in black and white, but they all afford us insight into the Characters: they all cast a shadow on the story, and so they are all important. We can never know too much about our Characters. The details that do make it to the page are those we find particularly striking and consequential. Revelations lurk in the details.

—John Dufresne, *The Truth that Tells a Lie, the Lie That Tells A Truth*

Answer the following questions quickly, but thoroughly. You might not use any of these in your story, but by the time you get to the last question, you should have a clear sense of a Character with a unique history...and a future. Now, put him or her in the story.

1. Character's name?
2. Age at the start of story?
3. What are the key dates in Character's life—anniversaries/deaths/important days?
4. What is the last big argument Character had with anyone—where, when, about what?
5. Has Character ever had his/her heart broken? By who? When? (doesn't have to be romantic)
6. What **doesn't** Character talk about with anyone—not even their spouse or closest friend?
7. Describe a perfect day off from work and responsibility. What would Character do?
8. Describe the part of the day Character likes best—where is he, what is he doing?
9. Does she collect anything (cigarette lighters, teapots, sea glass) Why this collection?
10. Just before the story begins, what does Character wish he had more time for in his life?
11. What are two bad habits (major—smoking, drinking; or minor—leaving dirty dishes in the sink)
12. What does Character do when he/she can't sleep?
13. Name three little things that irritate her?
14. What is she good at? Skilled at? What does she know a lot about?
15. What would he/she love to learn more about?
16. Before the story begins, what is Character afraid of? Name one big fear (don't just say death—say “getting breast cancer, because Mom died of this”) and name two little fears
17. What has Character lied about recently?
18. What is the most important thing that has happened to Character?
19. Where does Character live at the time of the story?
20. Describe one other place Character lived before this.
21. Name three unique objects in Character's favorite room of the house.

Character Development

22. What window does Character look out of the most (in her home or office) and what can she see from this window?
23. What does Character do for a living?
24. As a child, what did Character want to be when he grew up?
25. What does Character want in her life when the story starts—this could be everything from the coffee to hurry and finish brewing, to getting a reservation in a crowded restaurant tonight, to hoping when she reads the obituaries that she won't see the name of anyone she knows...**List 4-5 wants, big and little.**
26. Describe one happy memory from the past 5 years in Character's life:
who/what/when/where?