

## Characterization Problems and Solutions

Based on and Expanded from *Beginnings, Middles and Ends* by Nancy Kress © 1993 and *Creating Short Fiction* by Damon Knight © 1985

### Problem:

Boring, cardboard characters, stereotypes or characters readers don't care about.

### Solution:

Get to know your characters and share that appropriately with the readers.

### How:

1. Write brief bio-sketches of all main characters before starting the story.
2. Write a description of one character by another or even by two but only including the most telling one in the story. (Note that this is a twofer, you get to know the other character by what they chose to notice, harp on etc.)
3. Write a scene where the main character comes home and find out what they do. This doesn't have to be included in the story... probably shouldn't be... but will help the author know things about the character. They have buy more seed because the birds are about out. Did you know your MC keeps birds?
4. Write a scene from the character's life outside the frame of the story. How do they act in VERY DIFFERENT circumstances?
5. Have MC meet and converse with another character very much like him or her (i.e. two military men, two valley girls etc.). This helps build up the minor nuances that make or break a memorable character.
6. Write or rewrite a couple of scenes from several first person viewpoints. Be in the characters head and feel their emotions. If you can't hear or see anything, then cut this character or expand them to make more interesting.
7. Identify and enrich the motivation. Weak motivation = weak characters.
8. Characters must make choices and conflict points and undergo change (or absolute refusal to change) by the end.
9. Proportion is important. Reaction must be proportional to the action.
10. Reaction must not violate the set-up of the character's disposition, value set or motivation.