

Day 3 already!

I hope by now you are feeling more comfortable to sit down and put pen to paper, and that the exercises are inspiring you. Today, we are tackling the big one – character. Character is the basis for all of our stories. Characters drive ideas, interpret the story and bring the reader into our world.

When you think about your favourite books, TV shows or movies – it is character that we immediately think about. For me, the most interesting characters are the ones who are flawed, who we can relate to, who we can see elements of ourselves in.

Relatable characters are always the most engaging and interesting – even the bad guys. Think about Snape from Harry Potter – even though he is immensely unlikable throughout the series, we develop a sense of empathy for him as his character develops. (Actually, Harry Potter is a good study of character in general for young writers and readers – even if some of it is cliché).

Today, see can you create characters that interest YOU. Think about the characters that you admire and why. Could you adopt any of their outlooks to improve your own? I just finished reading a book called *Unsheltered* by Barbara Kingsolver and one of the central characters Tig was a force to be reckoned with. Wise, practical with a real social conscience. Those are traits I admire so I'll be trying to channel her for the next while (I say *trying*, I might not succeed!).

Same format as always – a warm up, a piece of work to get you thinking and a prompt.

Happy writing!

Eimear

Warm Ups

- A simple one to start! Set your timer for 2 minutes and write down as many words beginning with the letter 'S' as you can think of. No plurals!
- Next, from that list pick your favourite word, reset your timer to three minutes and free write on that topic as in previous weeks. No rules, just write.
- This is a personal one, so keep it private if you like. Write a list of your positive personality traits and attributes and then a list of your not so positive ones. Be honest – no one is judging, this list could help inspire a future character or help you realise how wonderful you actually are! For me, some of my positives are that I'm hardworking, thoughtful and loyal. My not so positives are – impatience and bad temper (oh it can be bad!).
- Go for a walk, take your notebook if you like. It can be around your garden or the block, and needn't take very long. Focus on what's happening when you're out and about, and try and be as present as possible. When you're back write down 3 things that you saw, 3 things that you heard, something you smelled, something you could feel (the missing sense here is taste obviously but I don't expect you to start munching on leaves or gravel!)

This story by Malinda Lo was published in The New York Times as a response to archived photos. You can find the original article and picture here

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/28/books/young-adult-fiction-asian-american-vintage-photographs-archives.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

Don't Speak

Inside the pig's head, it was starting to stink. The half-dozen mints Jenny Watanabe had eaten at the beginning of her shift to pre-emptively perfume the interior had long since worn off. She was already sweating like crazy, and the new Big Bad Wolf had just begun chasing them. She knew it was only going to get worse. Tokyo Disneyland on a hot day was a long slog through mobs of squealing children clutching melting ice cream cones while executing repetitive choreography in bulky costumes.

She didn't know it would be like this when she started the job. She had thought it would be a welcome break from the demoralizing struggle of learning Japanese, because at Tokyo Disneyland, everything was in English. She was Yonsei, which meant she looked Japanese but didn't know how to say much beyond *sumimasen*. When she first arrived at the park, one week into her exchange program, seeing all those English signs felt like coming home.

The honeymoon didn't last long.

"The first rule is that you do not talk," the character trainer informed her on her first day. Jenny was secretly relieved. She had been cast as Practical Pig, the one who builds his house out of stone. He was distinguished from his impractical brothers Fifer and Fiddler by his angry eyebrows.

She had not anticipated how quickly "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" would lodge in her head as the most irritating ear worm in the history of ear worms, or how Practical's eyebrows could terrify little kids. A few days into the job, after a kid literally ran away from her while shrieking, Fifer (a Japanese guy who spoke perfect English, making her feel extra ashamed of her rudimentary knowledge of her ancestral tongue) said, "Why do you think Practical is constantly being recast? You're the third Practical in two months. No one can cut it!"

And then there was the mind trip of spending so much time in Practical's head. It was kind of like being transported into an alternate dimension. All sound was muffled by the extensively padded pig cheeks, and her vision was restricted to only what she could see through Practical's tiny, immovable eye holes. Usually it was Fifer's outflung white-gloved hand as he did his Irish-dance-inspired jig.

If she concentrated enough on Fifer's hand and on her own choreography (it really was challenging to dance around in a rotund pig's belly), she could almost convince herself that she wasn't real at all. She was simply a cog in the machine that was Tokyo Disneyland. Inside the pig, she was anonymous; she was no one. Staying silent had never seemed so natural. She experienced her pigness as a void — a black hole that had been stripped of its sucking power and was now simply nothing.

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That morning, when she arrived in the backstage changing area, a blond girl was sitting on the bench putting on the Big Bad Wolf's feet. "Hey, I'm Veronica," the blonde said. "I'm the new Wolf."

Veronica! Jenny had seen Veronica before. She'd been wearing a Swiss Miss-type outfit over by Cinderella's Castle. The good thing about being inside a pig's head was that people didn't know when she was checking them out. Outside the head, she was tongue-tied.

Veronica gave her an eyebrow tilt. "You O.K.?"

"Um, yeah." Jenny pulled out her mints and popped several into her mouth, then thought she should probably offer some to Veronica. She held out the tin. "The head gets stuffy," she explained.

Veronica nodded gravely and took a couple. "Thanks. You're American too, right?"

"Um, yeah." She started to get dressed in her costume.

"Did you ever think that being forced to stay quiet all the time is like an infringement on our First Amendment rights? Like, we already have to be nice all day and let little kids hit us. This is practically abuse. We should start a union."

Jenny didn't know what to say. She began to turn red from embarrassment at her own dorkiness, so she put on Practical's head.

Veronica gasped. "Check out your eyebrows! You look pissed!"

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It was clear that Veronica was a different kind of Wolf. She was way more into it than the old Wolf, and there was a campy, exaggerated quality to the way she chased them. Jenny found it distracting. She couldn't access her void space the way she normally could, because she kept wanting to watch Veronica.

As the climax of their performance approached, Veronica accidentally-on-purpose tripped and fell, dramatically pounding her gloved hands on the ground in a silent tantrum. Jenny and the other Pigs arranged themselves in a rough triangle, doing their step-touch, step-touch thing. At the end of the song they were supposed to skip in a circle, jump-turn twice and wave jazz hands at the gathered audience. But then Jenny saw Veronica give up on her silent tantrum and — in complete defiance of the official choreography — prop her head up on one hand to watch the Pigs finish.

Jenny felt as if she could hear Veronica challenging her: *Union! First Amendment! Pissed!*

Fifer was beginning his jazz hands, but instead of joining him, Jenny had the irresistible urge to raise her fist in the air. The white glove squished as she clenched

her fingers. The audience gaped at her silently. She was exhilarated; she could practically feel the sun on her face.

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A few questions for you to think about

- Who is the main character?
- Are the main character and other characters described through dialogue – by the way they speak (dialect or slang for instance)?
- Has the author described the characters by physical appearance, thoughts and feelings, and interaction (the way they act towards others)?
- Are they static/flat characters who do not change?
- Are they dynamic/round characters who DO change?
- What type of characters are they? What qualities stand out? Are they stereotypes?
- Are the characters believable?

Write down any thoughts or ideas you have in your notebook.

The Prompt

Now it's time to create your own character! Use these headings to create a character that YOU would want to read about.

Name:

Nickname:

Age:

Life story:

Family Background:

Mother:

Father:

Brothers (Oldest to Youngest):

Sisters (Oldest to Youngest):

Where do they live:

Likes:

What's important to them:

Fears:

Dreams:

Personality:

Eye Colour:

Birthplace:

Dress Style:

Traits:

Best Friend:

Enemies:

Temper:

Talents:

Flaws:

Habits: