

## **Putting the Woohoo in Who's Who**

**Characters. We're all characters on our own and we all seek to write the ones who can make our readers laugh, cry, like/love, dislike/hate, and hopefully make a difference in someone's life. We will be taking a closer look at the art and practicalities of constructing characters to better determine your story's type, the hierarchy of your characters within the work, and how to raise the emotional stakes.**

**Constructing characters to better determine your story's type. Good characterization isn't the same for every type of story.**

**FOUR Basic factors present in every story with varying degrees of emphasis.**

### **MICE**

**M-Milieu World surrounding the character. (Landscape, culture, weather, law...) Milieu stories focus on the world. Gulliver's Travels, Jurassic Park**

**I-Idea Idea is the information the character is meant to discover or learn in the course of the story. Problem is posed at the beginning and character goes to the solving of problem. Agatha Christie**

**C-Characters Nature of the character(s) in the story. The what they do and why. The protagonist is trying to change themselves. Flowers for Algernon**

**E-Events Everything that happens and why. Key concept is there is disorder in the world and it must be dealt with. Oedipus**

Good characterization comes from the combinations of these four.

## **Hierarchy of Characters**

1. **Walk-ons and Placeholders**-Usually no specific names and don't reappear...meant to give realism but disappear. (Part of the Scenery and Stereotypes-Reader gets exactly what they expect with no growth.)
2. **Minor Characters**-Can make a difference in the plot, but can appear once or twice and disappear. Reader is not involved with them emotionally. (Have quirks, exaggeration, or obsessive.)
3. **Major Characters**-Reader should care about their outcome. Major doesn't necessarily mean time in story. Example: Curly's wife in *Of Mice and Men* is pivotable in the action, but her fate isn't one that the readers will truly lament.

Techniques of characterization you can control.

Ordinary vs. Strangeness

Amount of time actually in piece

Character's potential for making meaningful choices

Other characters' focus on them

Degree of involvement in action

Reader's sympathy and empathy for the character

Narration from the character's viewpoint

## **Raising Emotional Stakes**

Suffering: Both the character suffering and causing it

**Sacrifice:** Can show character making it, but you can also show how it affects the person the sacrifice is made for

**Jeopardy:** Anticipated pain or loss. The greater the jeopardy, the greater the pain or payoff must be.

**Sexual Tension:** Characters must be believable as partners. Note: It's the promise that has the best tension...not the act.

**Signs and Portents:** Connect character to world around them. Twister-Two characters who are in turmoil and have the potential for disaster. Same with the weather outside. And both people and world have to experience the trauma and begin to rebuild.

Information taken from the Elements of Fiction Writing series Characters and Viewpoint by Orson Scott Card.