

CHARACTER CAKE

By

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Creating in depth three-dimensional characters draws readers into your novel. This article sifts through the main ingredients in character development. To help us out, I searched through my trusty dusty cookbook and pulled out my favorite cake recipe. Break out your aprons, and let's make a main character.

Character Cake

2 cups all purpose Identification flour
1½ cups Sociology sugar
½ cup Physiology shortening
1 cup Psychology milk
3½ teaspoons Motivation baking powder
1 teaspoon Stubbornness salt
1 teaspoon Contradiction vanilla
3 Change eggs

Pre-heat oven to 350° Conflict. Slowly beat all ingredients until well blended. Pour batter into greased and floured Manuscript. Bake until desired Character Growth is reached.

2 cups all purpose Identification flour

Make your character someone the reader can relate with. The easiest way to establish this identification is through emotions. For example, we've all been scared at one point in time. Fear is an emotion we can all relate with.

Use emotion to draw your readers in. You want your reader to feel what they are reading is actually happening to them or someone they know. Or many readers long to escape reality and live life through the characters, and our fictional characters are allowed to take chances readers would like to take in real life. With all of that said, stay within reason when your characters take risks.

Determine what the emotional needs of your target audience are, then strive to create three-dimensional characters that fulfill those needs. The remainder of this article steps through the dimensions and gives insight on adding depth.

1½ cups Sociology sugar (First Dimension)

Our environment factors heavily into the attitudes we've developed. The same goes for your fictional characters. What type of home did your character grow up in: financially stable, poor, a two parent home, a single parent home, a foster home, no home, a loving environment, an abusive environment, a drug infested environment, a racist environment, a big city, a small town, an only child, no siblings, many siblings... Did he/she go to college? What happened to him/her after they left their childhood home? Is he/she presently married, divorced, widowed, working, homeless, wealthy, in debt... You get the picture. What is your character's background, and how does it affect them today? How does your character act and react to other characters in the novel and why?

½ cup Physiology shortening (Second Dimension)

Physiology is more than the character's physical appearance. It also deals with the character's general health. For example, is your main character a diabetic who has a special diet? Is your main character blind, hard of hearing, infertile, lame, malformed, healthy, or just plain short?

Mannerisms also fall into the physiology category. Does your character have a habit of biting on her lip when nervous? Does he smooth down his mustache? Does your character speak a mile a minute when anxious? Is your character clumsy?

Let's try accents. Does your character have a southern drawl, a Texas twang, an Irish lilt? Is his/her voice nasal, raspy, husky, clear, soft, loud, obnoxious...

1 cup Psychology milk (Third Dimension)

Sociology and physiology play a large role in developing your character's psychology. What is your character's self-image? Someone who is confident acts differently than someone who is insecure. Someone who believes they are beautiful acts differently than someone who believes they are ugly. Someone ostracized by society acts differently than someone coddled by society. What are your character's attitudes, ambitions, and frustrations? How does he/she react to others? How does your character perceive his/her treatment by others? Internal thoughts are an excellent way to reveal your character's psychology. What is the main internal struggle this character must overcome or be overcome by?

3½ teaspoons Motivation baking powder

This is the big W-H-Y. Know what motivates your characters to take one action as opposed to another action: is it self-preservation, fulfilling a desire... This knowledge should be carried into your writing for your main character. Your reader needs to know why your honest cop decided to take that bribe, why someone who is scared of relationships is pursuing a relationship, why loving parents have cut their children out of their lives...

1 teaspoon Stubbornness salt

The protagonist, main character, may compromise here and there, but who they are does not change. This concept will become clearer after you've read the next two sections.

1 teaspoon Contradiction vanilla

Let's say you've created a heroine who is extremely shy. Some categorize her as being afraid of her own shadow. When she's at home alone, she imagines herself singing concerts and performing in front of large groups of people. One day she musters up her courage and joins the church choir. Joining this choir is contradictory to her personality, but her desire to sing and be heard outweighs her fear.

Visions of grandeur over, she stands in the back corner of the choir and barely opens her mouth. Our heroine, Darla, is still the shy woman she was before she joined the choir.

During the choir's anniversary concert, the soloist, Darla's best friend, starts choking up during her song. Her father had just passed away, and this was his favorite song. She turns to the heroine with pleading in her eyes. She knows Darla has an angelic singing voice because as children they'd sing together.

Seeing her friend in trouble, Darla steps forward. Instead of focusing on the nausea her fear is causing, she focuses on the beauty of every note. She closes her eyes and sings. The choir joins in, and soon the heroine is taken over by the music and is singing from her heart.

In your novel, make sure you show the motivations behind your character's contradictory actions. We all do things that seem contradictory to our nature and the outside world. The reader needs to understand the why or in this case how an extremely shy individual could stand in front of a large crowd and sing a solo.

3 Change eggs

Just as humans change, so must your main character. Okay, I haven't lost my mind. I know two sections ago I said your main character shouldn't change. Let's look at our shy heroine again. She changed from someone who would only sing in the privacy of her own home, to a participant in the choir, to a soloist. Over time our heroine loses her fear of singing in front of an audience—thus changes. But her shyness keeps her from introducing herself to the new tenor in the choir. She's caught him watching her a few times when she was sneaking glances at him. After rehearsals she rushes off, afraid he will approach.

Pre-heat oven to 350° Conflict

Conflict springs from internal sources, such as our heroine longing to perform but being too shy to sing for others; and external sources, such as the heroine's best friend pleading for help and the new tenor the heroine is interested in.

Conflict does more than spice up your story. Through your characters' reactions to conflict, they reveal themselves and move the story forward. Insure you give your main characters internal and external conflict (issues) to work through during the course of the novel.

Pour batter into greased and floured Manuscript

Your protagonist needs someone to be in conflict with. Often time the best candidate is someone with the opposite makeup. These two characters must somehow be tied together so the protagonist can't just walk away.

Let's pick on our shy heroine again. Darla knows the new tenor is interested in her. She's interested in him but afraid to pursue because of her shyness and her heart was broken in a past relationship.

She would quit the choir and move to a different church, but she grew up in her present church and is as comfortable as someone with her shyness can be. Singing in this particular choir is her one freedom from the shyness, and she can't give it up. She'll just have to figure out a way to avoid the new tenor. Let's call him Anthony. He is what some would call a people person.

One day Anthony leaves choir rehearsal five minutes early. Darla is delighted she won't have to rush out. After rehearsal, she gathers her items and walks out. Standing just outside of the door is Anthony. Needless to say, she is shocked to see him. He introduces himself and walks her to her car.

Now you can see where this story will lead. She is shy, and he is outgoing. She avoids, and he goes head on. The unbreakable bond is her fear of losing her newfound freedom.

Bake until desired Character Growth is reached

Throwing our characters into conflict offers opportunities to show character growth. This is the last time I'll pick on Darla, I promise. Through internal and external conflict, we saw her grow from someone basically afraid of her own shadow into a soloist for a choir. What if she hadn't stepped forward for her friend, could we still have shown growth? Yes. We could have shown her at home battling feelings of guilt. She could have decided her shyness had become too crippling and to seek help. Must your characters have positive growth? No. What if eventually Darla became an agoraphobic? What if Anthony was a psychiatrist?

I'll allow you to finish the story about our shy heroine. What conflicts do you see Darla and Anthony getting into? How will she reveal herself and grow from these experiences? How will the story end?

Wrap up

Excellent books that cover Character Development

Characters Make Your Story by Maren Elwood ←best book ever written on the subject!

The Art of Creative Writing by Lajos Egri

The Writer's Journey 2nd Edition Mythic Structure for Writers by Christopher Vogler

Here is a list of a few emotions you can use for identification:

Abandonment, Anger, Anxiety, Apathy, Betrayal, Concern, Confusion, Contentment, Curiosity, Defeat, Desire, Despair, Excitement, Fear, Fondness, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Grief, Guilt, Happiness, Hate, Hope, Hostility, Irritation, Jealousy, Loneliness, Longing, Love, Passion, Panic, Rejection, Resignation, Restlessness, Revenge, Sadness, Shame, Surprise, Suspicion, Sympathy, Tenderness, Tormented, Worry

If you have any questions, you can always reach me at deatri@deewrites.com

It's been fun. Now go bake some Character Cake.

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