

# Constructing Memorable Characters

with Editor and Book Coach Charlotte Chipperfield



# Welcome!

- Create compelling protagonists with rich character arcs.
- Develop dynamic supporting characters.
- Explore internal conflicts that drive the plot.

By the end of this workshop, you'll know how to craft compelling protagonists, create internal conflicts that drive the plot, and develop a rich supporting cast. These elements are essential for writing characters readers will love—or love to hate!

# I'm Charlotte Chipperfield

- Book Coach
- Developmental Editor
- Founder of Her Narrative
- Published author featured in an anthology (releasing next month) with a novel and non-fiction book coming this year.

When I'm not writing or editing, I am:

- Horse riding
- Learning portuguese



# Conversation Starter

If your protagonist walked into this room right now,  
what's the first thing they'd say or do?

# Why Memorable Characters Matter

"Readers may forget the plot, but they won't forget the characters." – Unknown.

# Why Memorable Characters Matter

1. Characters drive emotional connection.
2. They transform plot events into relatable moments.

Think about a book that stuck with you—chances are, it's the characters who left a lasting impression because of the reasons listed above.

# Why Memorable Characters Matter

When you have compelling and memorable characters, readers will follow them anywhere. That's why:

- Characters can't be passive.
- Readers need to root for them early on.

# Creating Compelling Protagonists

The best protagonists are layered—filled with strengths, flaws, and desires that feel authentic.

For example, Kya from *Where the Crawdads Sing* overcomes abandonment and prejudice while clinging to her independence.



# Creating Compelling Protagonists

- Authentic flaws and strengths.
- Relatable imperfections that feel real to readers and make the character more human.
- Clear external goals.
- Clear internal desires.
- Relatable growth arc.

# Creating Compelling Protagonists

As writers, it is our job to bring your characters to life and draw readers into their journeys creating emotional resonance.

# Activity: Brainstorm Your Protagonist

Think about your protagonist.

- What are some of their mannerisms and personality traits that set them apart?
  - How do they move about the world? Shy? Extraverted? Class clown?

# Activity: Brainstorm Your Protagonist

- Who is your main character (MC) at the beginning of the book?

# Activity: Brainstorm Your Protagonist

- Who are they at the end of the book?

# Activity: Brainstorm Your Protagonist

- What does your protagonist want most?
  - What is their external desire?

# Activity: Brainstorm Your Protagonist

- What are they afraid of?
  - What is their internal conflict?

# Activity: Brainstorm Your Protagonist

- What flaw holds them back from achieving their goals?



# Creating Compelling Protagonists

Great job!

- These layers—outer traits, inner fears, and core desires—work together to create a dynamic protagonist.

# Internal Conflicts and Driving the Plot

Internal conflict is the heart of a good story. When your protagonist is torn between desires or beliefs, it creates tension that keeps readers hooked.

- Examples:
  - Desire for success vs. self-destructive tendencies.
  - Loneliness vs. fear of connection.

# Activity: Map Internal Conflict

Think about your protagonist's internal conflict.

- What are the two opposing desires or beliefs they're grappling with?
- How does this conflict shape their decisions?
- What is at stake if they fail to resolve their internal conflict?

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# Internal Conflicts and Driving the Plot

This internal conflict directly impacts the external actions your MC takes in the plot.

By overlaying the internal conflict and plot, you can create a cohesive, resonant story where the character's emotional growth aligns with the story's progression.

*AKA a character-driven story.*

# Internal Conflicts and Driving the Plot

Think of it like a layered map:

- The **internal conflict** represents the emotional journey—the invisible line that guides how the character grows, evolves, or resists change.
- The **plot** represents the external journey—the visible events and actions that test and challenge the character.

# Internal Conflicts and Driving the Plot

- When these two layers are intertwined, the external events force the character to confront their internal struggle, while the internal struggle shapes how the character reacts to those events.
- This alignment keeps the story compelling and ensures that every plot point has emotional stakes.



# Example: Internal Conflicts and Driving the Plot

## Wonder Woman

Internal Conflict: Diana (Wonder Woman) begins with a firm belief that humanity is inherently good and that her role as a warrior is to protect them. However, she also wrestles with naivety about the complexity of human nature and war. Her internal conflict centers on reconciling her idealism with the harsh reality of human imperfection.

# Example: Internal Conflicts and Driving the Plot

## Plot:

**Inciting Incident:** Steve Trevor crashes on Themyscira and brings news of World War I. Diana's internal belief that she can stop the war by defeating Ares (the God of War) drives her to leave her home.

- (Internal Layer: Diana feels it's her duty to protect humanity because she believes war is caused by an external force like Ares.)

**Midpoint:** Diana discovers the brutality of war and witnesses human suffering, which begins to challenge her simplistic belief that Ares alone is responsible.

- (Internal Layer: She starts to question whether humanity is worth saving if they're capable of such destruction on their own.)

# Example: Internal Conflicts and Driving the Plot

## Plot:

**Climax:** Diana confronts Ares, realizing that while he influences humanity, people also have free will and can choose both good and evil. This moment pushes her to embrace a more nuanced understanding of humanity.

- (Internal Layer: She reconciles her idealism with the reality of human flaws, choosing to love and fight for humanity despite their imperfections.)

**Resolution:** Diana accepts her role not as a savior who can stop all wars but as a protector who inspires humanity to strive for better.

- (Internal Layer: Her growth in understanding human nature mirrors her decision to continue fighting for peace.)

# Example: Internal Conflicts and Driving the Plot

By aligning Diana's internal journey with the external stakes, the story gains emotional depth and resonance.

The audience roots for her not just because she's fighting external villains but because she's also grappling with the core question of *what it means to be a hero for imperfect beings*.

# Internal Conflicts and Driving the Plot

By getting clear on your character's internal conflict alongside the plot, you ensure that every external challenge also has emotional stakes. Ask yourself:

- How does this event challenge the character's beliefs, fears, or desires?
- How does the character's reaction to this event reveal their growth or resistance to change?

Layering these two maps together creates a story that is not only action-packed but also deeply meaningful and keeps readers engaged.

# Character Relationships and Growth

Relationships reveal your protagonist's hidden facets. Whether it's a friendship, rivalry, or romance, these dynamics add depth.

Planning these arcs ensures that relationships feel authentic and impactful.

# Activity: Character Relationships and Growth

Think about the relationships in your story.

- What is one key relationship in your story? Why does this matter?
- How does this relationship challenge or support your protagonist's growth?
- How does it evolve over the course of the story?

# Developing Supporting Characters

These are the people who challenge, support, or reveal new sides of your protagonist.

- Think of the ensemble cast in *Big Little Lies* adds complexity to the story's central mystery.



# Activity: Supporting Character Sketch

Think about your cast of characters.

- Who is the most important supporting character in your story?
- What role do they play in your protagonist's journey—are they an antagonist, mentor, or challenger?
- How do their motivations differ from your protagonist's?

# Developing Supporting Characters

Through developing supporting characters and defining their relationship as it relates to the protagonist brings even deeper human elements into your story.

This, in turn, creates a deeper emotional relationship with the reader because they either see themselves in the characters or they can relate to what is happening emotionally on the page—it's all about the shared human experience!

# Creating Compelling Characters: Recap

1. The importance of knowing our characters both inside and out—internal conflicts can drive the plot.
2. The best protagonists are layered—filled with strengths, flaws, and desires that feel authentic.
3. Don't forget to develop supporting characters and leverage their relationships to the main character

# Creating Compelling Characters: Action Steps

Here are three strategies for constructing memorable characters:

1. Get clear on who your protagonist is—revisit the questions presented here today.
2. Map internal conflicts to help drive the plot.
3. Build a rich cast of supporting characters with meaningful relationships to the MC.

*Remember:* The more you can create emotional resonance for the reader, the more they will follow them anywhere.

# Resources and Q&A

- Further Reading:
  - *The Emotional Craft of Fiction* by Donald Maass.
  - *Save the Cat! Writes a Novel* by Jessica Brody.
  
- Invitation: Visit [HerNarrative.com/resources](https://HerNarrative.com/resources) for free writing tools
- Follow me on YouTube at [youtube.com/@HerNarrative](https://youtube.com/@HerNarrative).
  
- Contact Info: [hello@hernarrative.com](mailto:hello@hernarrative.com)