

MONSTERS! INK!

LESSON THREE

WHO ARE YOU?

Characters are the central element in any kind of storytelling. You may have built them, but like Dr. Frankenstein you want to breathe life into your creation! How do we do it? Well, we won't use lightning bolts like the master monster maker, but instead breathe life into our characters



through description. So, how would you describe them? Describing characters well means having a good hold on the descriptive words in our (or any) wonderful language, as well as visualizing the character as fully as you can. Let's start first by talking about how "character description" might refer to:

- **Physical appearance:** height, hair color, eye color, scars, etc.
- **Clothing:** puffy winter coat and goggles, leather pants, plaid jacket, etc.
- **Behavior:** twitchy, quiet with a lowered gaze, shifty eyes, etc.
- **Attitude:** "take no prisoners," friendly, distracted, etc.
- **Impression:** (i.e., How does a character make the point of view (POV) character *feel*?) scared, happy, attracted, etc.

When we look at that list, we can see that some types of description are more important for sharing insights into a character, and some are better at creating a visual image of a character. Think of it like you're a witness or an informant and you need to give an accurate description. What did they look like? What did they act like? How did they make you feel?

Remember, it's always best to show, don't just tell your audience a laundry list of traits. You don't want to describe your characters to death, but you also want to describe them so readers can get an idea of what they look like.

The key is to describe when it's **relevant** to the:

- story,
- character,
- target audience.

If we want readers to think our characters are prepared for the impending snowstorm, we *do* need to mention their hats, gloves, and jackets (i.e., relevant to the story). If we want readers to get a feel for a character's quirky personality, we can mention their funky socks. *Those* details **add** to readers' understanding of the story or characters.

What characters **do** also tells a lot about them. For example, your character may walk with a slouch or may strut with bravado. She may nibble daintily or tear into food with hedonistic abandon. He may make direct eye contact or move his eyes nervously about the room. The way your character moves paints a portrait. You can also use action words to describe physical features. For example, a nose can be "twitchy" and a mouth can be "playful."



REPORTING FOR THE SLIME TIMES! GETTING INTO CHARACTER!



Teacher Tip: With the right guidance, students can work and learn together — pushing each other farther, faster. Warm-ups, particularly collaborative writing, get better over time. Students need to develop the skills associated with it. So, don't be surprised if the first few times are difficult and result in so-so writing or answers. Like any form, students need to practice warming up to get good at it.

A surefire method for getting into a story is to get into a character. Getting to know a character sometimes requires reading between the lines

and “imagining” how the character would react in a given situation, or what would make them sad, angry, or happy. As all great writers know, the interview process is the best way to get to know someone.

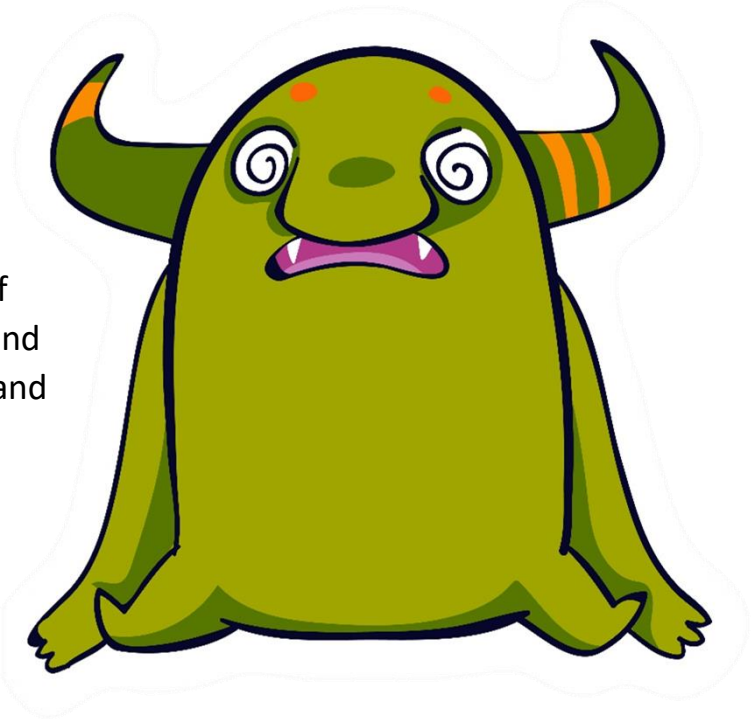


The included questions are frequently used in interviews so you may want to have students work with their story partner (or switch things up and have them work with a new partner who interviews them about the characters they built) and have them pretend they are reporters that are interviewing the (author as their) character(s) or the author about their characters. (They will switch roles and interview each other.)

Depending on the level of your class, you may want to start with a 5-10-minute brainstorming session to allow students to begin to come up with (and write down) answers for their characters before having them begin. They can write out their partner’s/their own answers during the interview and hand this in to you afterwards.

Activity Strategy: Give a time limit. (Do this multiple times within the activity time frame,

decreasing the time amount as students get more familiar and comfortable within the activity.) Encourage the answerers to never hesitate, but instead use ‘stream of consciousness’ answering, think quickly and spontaneously (they can always go back and edit their character and refine answers later, this is simply to help them start thinking and expanding their knowledge and ideas about their characters).



Tip: Encourage participation with the spirit of competition! A good reporter

needs to be able to get the answers they need and a good informant needs to give all the information they can! Give student pairs two points for each question asked that has a complete answer (“I don’t know” doesn’t count!)

The team with the most effective interviews/most points (questions asked with complete answers) within the timeframe wins!

As any good reporter does, to warm up their informant and get the pertinent facts, they might start with questions that address the basics about a character:

- What is your character's name? Does the character have a nickname?
- What is your character's hair color? Eye color?
- What kind of distinguishing facial features does your character have?
- Does your character have a birthmark? Where is it? What about scars? How did he get them?
- Who are your characters friends and family? Who does she surround herself with? Who are the people your character is closest to? Who does he wish he were closest to?
- Where was your character born? Where has she lived since then? Where does she call home?
- Where does your character go when he's angry?
- What is her biggest fear? Who has she told this to? Who would she never tell this to? Why?
- Does she have a secret?
- What makes your character laugh out loud?
- When has, your character been in love? Had a broken heart?



Now dig deeper by asking more unconventional questions:

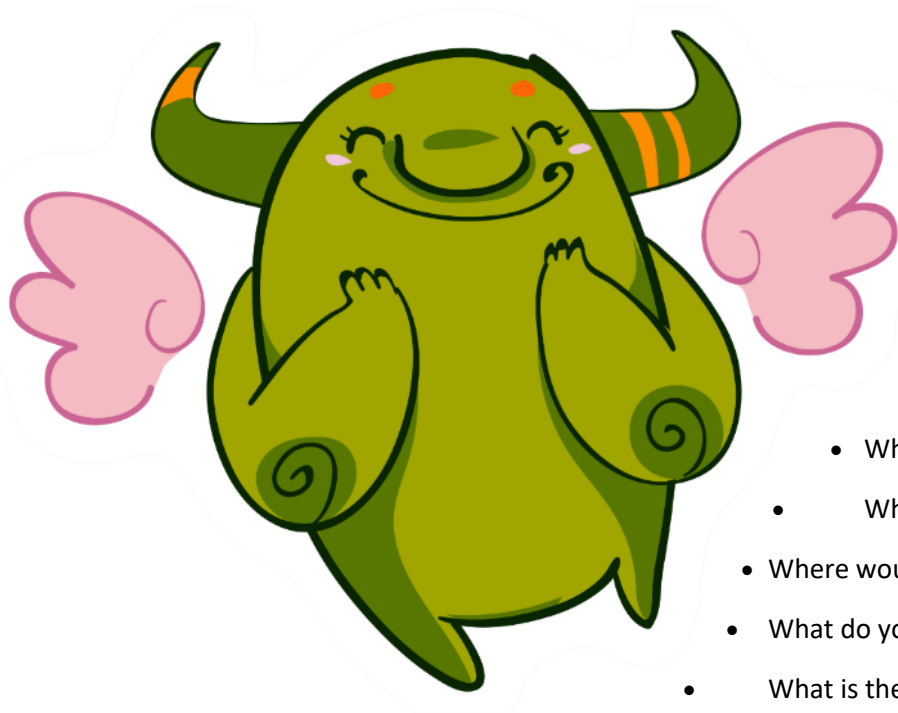
- Is your character more of a hunter or a gatherer?
- Your character is a new addition to the crayon box. What color would they be and why?
- What was the last gift they gave someone?
- What did your character want to be when they grow up?

- What is in your character’s refrigerator right now? On her bedroom floor? On her nightstand? In her garbage can?
- Look at your character’s feet. Describe what you see there. Does he wear dress shoes, gym shoes, or none at all? Is he in socks that are ratty and full of holes? Or is he wearing a pair of blue and gold slippers knitted by his grandmother?
- When your character thinks of her childhood kitchen, what smell does she associate with it? Sauerkraut? Oatmeal cookies? Paint? Why is that smell so resonant for her?
- Your character is doing intense spring cleaning. What is easy for her to throw out? What is difficult for her to part with? Why?
- Its Saturday at noon. What is your character doing? Give details. If he’s eating breakfast, what exactly does he eat? If she’s stretching out in her backyard to sun, what kind of blanket or towel does she lie on?
- What is one strong memory that has stuck with your character from childhood? Why is it so powerful and lasting?
- Your character is getting ready for a night out. Where is she going? What does she wear? Who will she be with?

Proust was a famous author who developed these questions for writers to interrogate their characters. Try using them on each other in their character interviews, to develop fully rounded monsters.

- What do you consider your greatest achievement?
- What is your idea of perfect happiness?
- What is your current state of mind?
- What is your favorite occupation?
- What is your most treasured possession?
- What or who is the greatest love of your life?
- What is your favorite journey?
- What is your most marked characteristic?
- When and where were you the happiest?





- What is it that you most dislike?
- What is your greatest fear?
- What is your greatest extravagance?
- Which living person do you most despise?
- What is your greatest regret?
- Which talent would you most like to have?
- Where would you like to live?
- What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?
- What is the quality you most like in a man?
- What is the quality you most like in a woman?
- What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?
- What is the trait you most deplore in others?
- What do you most value in your friends?
- Who is your favorite hero of fiction?
- Whose are your heroes in real life?
- Which living person do you most admire?
- What do you consider the most overrated virtue?
- On what occasions do you lie?
- Which words or phrases do you most overuse?
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
- What are your favorite names?
- How would you like to die?
- If you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?
- What is your motto?

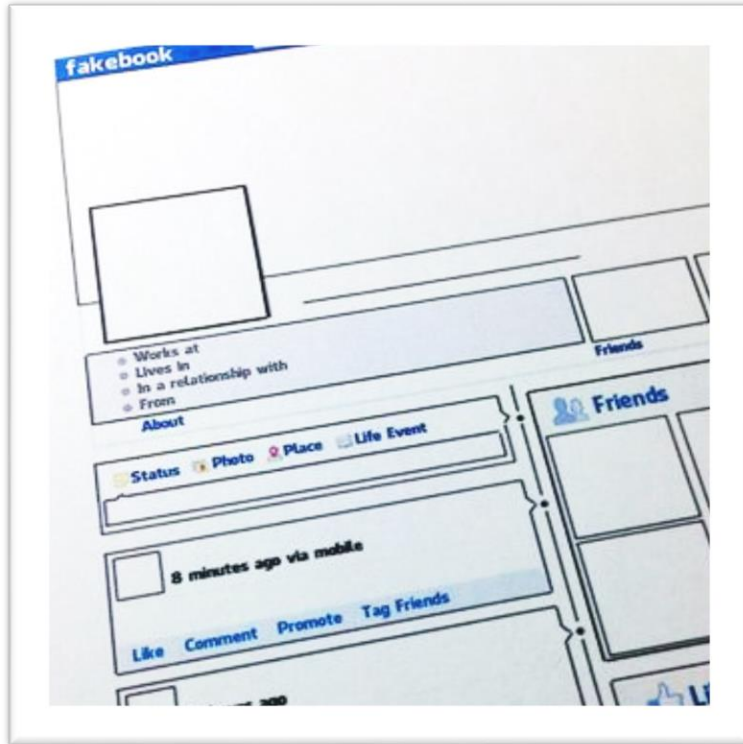


OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FAKEBOOK--UPDATING CHARACTER PROFILES

Worksheet Copyright 2011 by Enflourish Publishing. All rights reserved. Handouts are reproducible for classroom use only. Activity Written and Developed by Pedro Pereira

A new twist on the **character sketch**! Facebook has become so much part of our lives that its lingo has even become part of everyday speech, such as a relationship becoming “Facebook Official”. Thus,



relating class material to social networking can ground certain concepts into their reality.

Have students create Fakebook Profile pages for each of the important characters in their story/stories as they build them (and will later be used to help them build their stories) using the included templates.

Encourage each student to think about who the last five or six people/creatures (e.g., their other characters) to post on that character’s wall would be and what they would say.

Option: On the back of their Profile page, have them write an “About Me” paragraph, and maybe add boxes for “Favorite Movies” “Music” and other things that are on the Info page. This forces them to think about their characters deeply.

There are some great nuances to this activity that show just how deep the students can go into character analysis and character interaction (which are essential standards and some of the most tested types of questions).





(Profile Picture)

NAME: _____

Lives in: _____

Relationship status: _____

Original home: _____

Born on: _____

Works as: _____

Friends

(Profile Pic)

Name: _____

Lives in: _____

Original home: _____

Works as: _____

(Profile Pic)

Name: _____

Lives in: _____

Original home: _____

Works as: _____

(Profile Pic)

Name: _____

Lives in: _____

Original home: _____

Works as: _____

Share: Status Photo Link

What's on your mind? (Write below):

Comments from Friends

→ Name of this person:

(Pic of Person)

Comment from this person:

People you may know

(Profile Pic)

(Name of person)

Events

Event Title/Description:

(Day of Month)

Event Date: ____ / ____ / ____
Month Day Year

RSVP: Yes • No • Maybe

Event Title/Description:

(Day of Month)

Event Date: ____ / ____ / ____
Month Day Year

RSVP: Yes • No • Maybe



(Another Profile Picture)

Interests / Hobbies

1st interest / hobby: _____

2nd interest / hobby: _____

3rd interest / hobby: _____

My Top Personality Traits

My top personality trait is...

People know I have this trait because..

My second best personality trait is...

People know I have this trait because..

My Important Sayings & What I Meant by Them

A statement that I said:

My analysis of that statement:

facebook Search for people, places and things

Timeline **About** **Photos 433** **Friends 729** **More ▾**

About

- Works at
- Lives in
- In a relationship with
- From

Status Photo Place Life Event

[Post](#)

Friends

5 minutes ago near

[Like](#) [Comment](#) [Share](#)

2 minutes via mobile

4 minutes ago near

Likes

11 hours ago near

[Like](#) [Comment](#) [Share](#)