

WRITERLY LOVE

CHARACTER & SETTING WORKSHEETS

WAYS TO REVEAL CHARACTER

Note there are other ways to reveal character. (One I deliberately don't include on this list is stream of consciousness, as it's best avoided early on in your writing practice until you've got more of a handle on creating characters.)

Action—"Character is action," Aristotle.

"I run my hands down their long, finless backs..." (From "Phosphorescence" by Jane Eaton Hamilton.) / "She stares at Bàba's signed name on the papers..." (From "Tseung Family Snapshot" by Alexandra Chang)

Physicality

Her armpits were damp. They spoke through clenched teeth. His heart beat erratically. She scratched her legs. She was dizzy. Their eyes drooped. She couldn't sit still. Her stomach bloated.

Expression

She furrowed her brow. He pinched his lips. They frowned, grimaced, grinned, beamed, closed their eyes tight, and so forth...

Dialogue—"Speech is what characters do to each other," Elizabeth Bowen.

"Well. I'm sure you will look very pretty. You're my daughter." (From "Untangling Roots" by Mary Chen) / "It's a big un. Walked right down the main street of town, he did." (From "They Comes on the Ice" by Kate Felix.)

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WAYS TO REVEAL CHARACTER CONTINUED

Metaphor/Simile

She turned her lion-sized smile on him. "Every now and then the boy, his eyes like two steel spikes, would glance behind him where the leg stood." (From "Good Country People" by Flannery O'Connor.)

Allusion

"Whereas the Greeks had Zeus and Athena, we had people who still lived in Verdun."
Heather O'Neill (The Girl Who Was Saturday Night)

Setting & Surroundings

The place and time of your piece can (and probably should) reflect aspects of your characters and you can use setting descriptions in scenes as either a foil for your character or to amplify character's attributes. Curtains that flutter nervously when the people in the room are eerily calm, a car that growls or trees that shake, or a sky that turns a menacingly black alongside a character who seems safe, but really is not.

Character Reveal Exercise

Go through your work in progress and check to see how many ways you reveal character in your writing. If you use only a few of the above techniques, try some other ones. Note if you rely on any and be aware of this as you continue to develop the character in your narrative.

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QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR SETTING

Answer any that fit your work in progress.

How has setting contributed to the obstacles faced by your main character?

How will it be altered by the character's actions in the narrative?

What people have shaped this setting's past?

What eras have shaped this setting's identity?

CHARACTER & SETTING WORKSHEETS

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR SETTING CONTINUED

What secrets does this place hide?

What planet, country, region, and town is my piece set in?

What year is it?

In what season or time of year does my piece take place?

What is the culture like in my piece?

What is the political climate like in my piece?

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CHARACTER THROUGH THE SENSES

Go through each of the senses to take a full inventory of your characters and uncover places where you can flesh them out.

SIGHT What does your character look like? Do they resemble someone in real life?
What do they notice about how others look?

SOUND What does your character sound like? Describe the pitch and tone of their voice. What sort of language do they use? Are they the narrator?

TOUCH Is your character irritated or thrilled by physical sensations? Are they cold or warm to the touch? What textures do they love? What textures do they hate?

CHARACTER & SETTING WORKSHEETS

CHARACTER THROUGH THE SENSES CONTINUED

SMELL

How does your character smell? Like flowers? Motor oil? Rotting meat? How does this smell change during the narrative? What do they smell?

TASTE

What would you taste if you nibbled on your character's skin? What flavours do they hate? What flavours do they love?

INTUITION

What does your character's gut tell them (if only they would listen)? Who or what do they resonate with on an intuitive level?

CHARACTER & SETTING WORKSHEETS

SETTING THROUGH THE SENSES

Now go through each of the senses to take a full inventory of your setting.

SIGHT What does this place look like? Do it resemble other places? Does it look unlike other places? What do strangers who visit this place first notice??

SOUND What does this place sound like? Describe its hum or quiet. What languages are spoken and what rhythm and music does it have?

TOUCH Is this place cold or warm? What textures exist in the landscape? Do people come close and touch or keep their distance there?

CHARACTER & SETTING WORKSHEETS

SETTING THROUGH THE SENSES CONTINUED

SMELL What does this place and its people smell like? Flowers? Motor oil? Rotting meat? How does the smell of this place change during the narrative?

TASTE What would you taste if you licked the ground here? What foods or perfume scents waft in this place? What flavours the drinks they imbibe here?

INTUITION What do you intuitively know about this place (if only you would listen)? What people feel at home here? What people do not?