

Characterization Workshop

Notes from Hollywood by the Bay Seminar:

Sex, Lies & Longing by Michael Hauge

To elicit emotion in a book or screenplay, you must develop character, goal, and conflict. Character drives the structure. The character is NOT the story, but a vehicle through which the story is told. To design your character, answer the following questions about him/her.

Key elements of character

1. What is his longing?

This is announced out loud by the character. It's a deeply held desire he's just been playing lip service to.

It's something she/he hasn't found the courage to go after yet.

Example: I want to be married by the time I'm thirty.

2. What is his need?

Sometimes a character won't even face what he is longing for, which then becomes a need, a missing piece, a hole to fill that would make the person complete. But most characters can't admit something is missing.

Almost every need is the desire to connect with others in some way.

Example: I want to be loved.

3. What is his wound?

This can be an unhealed source of continuing pain. It happens long before the book begins.

Example: the death of a wife or love taken away

An ongoing situation.

Example: a childhood belief that is disempowering.

Have the character risk sharing his Wound Story directly with the True Love (Don't use flashbacks to reveal the Wound Story)

4. What is his belief about the way the his world works?

This is the character's universal rule about self that stems from his wound.

Example: If I show emotion, something terrible will happen.

5. What is the fear that grows out of this belief?

Where does danger lie for this character?

What would destroy them?

What would wound them again?

Example: I am terrified of letting people see my feelings

Two facets of a character for creating conflict and goal

1. The ID or identity

This is the persona, the mask, the self presented to the world. This is who the character *thinks* he is.

Have your character fill in this statement:

"I'll do whatever it takes to achieve my goal, just don't ask me to ____, because that's just not me."

Example: ...don't ask me to blurt out my feelings like a lovesick puppy, because that's just not me."

In a love triangle, the person left behind must embody the hero's ID.

2. The Essence

Who the character is without the armor.

The soul of the character.

Who the person the character is to become.

Who the person is without the attachments, property, etc.

The True Love must embody the hero's Essence.

Summary of Character

Nobody gets out of childhood unscarred.

We all take on identities to hide our true selves.

Everyone longs for something.

Create two goals using the character traits above:

1. Choose an external goal that has a clearly defined endpoint.

Example: Break up a wedding

The goal should grow out of the longing or the need. Have it pertain to the thing they've been paying lip service to.

Set the opportunity before them to achieve just what it is they've been desiring. If they don't go for it, they will lose their big change in life.

2. Choose an internal goal.

Based on the longing.

This has to be something he is conscious of, not the need he is blocking out.

This is what the character thinks is the path to self-worth.

If the character goes after the goal out of need instead of longing, then they may go after the goal for the wrong reason (out of fear, loneliness, etc.)

Example: To have the groom for myself just like always.

Example: Shrek

Need = to connect with others

Longing = To be left alone where he is better off

External goal = Save the princess

Internal Goal = Keep creatures out of swamp.

3. Most external goals land in four broad categories:

Stopping something from happening.

Retrieving something

Escaping

Winning

Create inner and outer conflict for your character

1. Inner Conflict

ID vs Essence

Your character announces that she wants a certain thing. Well, here it is. But the only way she is going to get it is to let go of the ID and step into the Essence. It's terrifying. Who she THINKS she is has to cease to exist. Her belief about the world has got to be challenged.

Example: Even though something bad might happen if I show emotion, I HAVE to tell him I love him before he gets married.

2. Outer Conflict

These are physical obstacles preventing the character from achieving his desire.

Stack the deck against the hero

Make the attainment of the goal seem impossible.

Design your four primary characters using the above information

1. Hero (explained above)

2. Nemesis

This is the character most in the way of the hero's outer goal.

This character should be the embodiment of the inner conflict of the hero (the dark side of the hero)

For example, in My Best Friend's Wedding, the heroine refused to show emotion because she thought something bad would happen. Her nemesis (the bride) could outwardly express emotion and everyone loved her.

3. Reflection Character

This is the sidekick, the best-friend or mentor.

This character supports and helps achieve the outer goal.

This character reveals the inner conflict or essence by holding the hero's feet to the fire, insisting "It's not you!"

4. Romantic Character

Part of the hero's goal.

The reward for overcoming the hero's inner conflict—the Essence winning over the ID.

This character sees beneath the ID to the Essence and falls in love with that.

Has a conflict with the hero's ID.

Connects on the level of Essence.