

Scriptwriting Skill Module

Characters

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Identify the main types of characters, key methods of characterization, and focus on character motivation
- Use knowledge of characters to write better scripts

RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

- *You Try It!* Student Worksheet – “Characters: The Six-Fold Path to Great Characters”

Additional Online Support:

- www.holtmcdougal.hmhco.com
- www.BlueNoseEd.com

Teach the Skill

1. Introduce Characters: Explain that **characters**—the people, animals, or imaginary creatures that take part in a story—are the heart of scriptwriting. Characters that intrigue audiences are the most important part of a script. There are different **types of characters**. Each type has a different function in a script.

- **Main characters** are the characters—usually one person—who is the script’s main focus. The main character is also called the **protagonist**. The protagonist has a concrete goal. He or she wants to get home, to land a specific job, or to marry a specific person.
- Protagonists always have people or forces opposing them. Often it is a single character, called the **antagonist**.
- Usually, scripts have **minor characters**. Minor characters can help the main character, hinder the main character, or simply provide information about the main character and the world of the script.
- Characters of all types can be described as either round or flat. **Round characters** are complex and highly developed, with different sides to their personalities. **Flat characters** are characters that are not highly developed.
- **Stereotypes** are flat characters that conform to fixed and sometimes denigrating patterns.
- **Foils** are characters—sometimes flat, sometimes round—who exist to provide a contrast with the main character.

2. Teach Characters:

A. Teach Character Motivation: Explain that scriptwriters have several different methods to let the audience know what to think about characters. These methods are:

- **Direct comments**, in voiceovers (In scripts, these should be used sparingly.)
- **Physical traits of a character**
- **Speech and actions of a character**
- **What other characters think, say, or do toward one another**

Have the students act out the following script. After they are done, draw the diagram that follows the script on the board, and have the class fill it out.

EXAMPLE

THE DREADMAN HOUSE

FADE IN:

EXTERIOR: BIG VICTORIAN HOUSE – NIGHT

An ancient, rusted mailbox has a name in gothic letters on it: Dreadman

INTERIOR: RASHEEDA and ALEX follow MARCO through the door of the old Dreadman House. Moonlight spills in through cracked windows. Everywhere are long, dark shadows, old furniture with feet like animal’s claws, dust-covered portraits, mysterious creaks in the walls.

Marco walks a few steps ahead of Rasheeda and Alex. He picks up an old book off a table, thumbs through it roughly, then tosses it to the floor with a bang. Rasheeda peers around her, a dazed smile on her face. Alex picks up the book that Marco has let drop. He and Rasheeda exchange a look, then Alex puts the book back on the table.

Marco, walking ahead, reaches the bottom of the old staircase.

MARCO

Come on, you wimps! You’re going back on the dare, are you?

ALEX

Don’t worry about us. If anyone wimps out, it’ll be you!

MARCO starts up the stairs. RASHEEDA gives ALEX a quizzical look. ALEX shrugs.

A cracking noise splits the darkness. Alex jumps into Rasheeda’s arms. Rasheeda holds Alex like a groom carrying a bride over the threshold. While Rasheeda is holding Alex off the floor, Marco whirls around, laughs, then runs up the stairs.

ALEX

I’m scared!

RASHEEDA

I sort of gathered that.

Rasheeda puts Alex back on the floor. Marco calls from upstairs.

MARCO

Are you guys coming, or not?

Rasheeda shakes her head, then she leads Alex upstairs.

- Write the following diagram on the board. Working as a class, have the students fill it out.

How We Learn About the Characters	Examples from the Script
Direct Comments, in voiceovers	None—no voiceovers in script
Physical Traits of Characters	
Speech of Characters	

Actions of Characters	
What Characters Say About Each Other, or How they React to Each other	

B. Teach Character Motivation: Explain that everyone behaves the way they do for a reason. To be clear about the motivations of characters in their scripts, students should know exactly what their characters want. The wants of characters must be specific. It is not enough for a character to want “artistic fulfillment,” or “world peace.” A character in a script must want and work for one particular thing: a dream role in a play, or a global ban on cluster bombs.

- Read the following short narrative
- Afterwards, write on the board the questions that follow the narrative. Ask the students to answer the questions and to explain their answers.

EXAMPLE

A crow stole a piece of meat and flew up to a tree branch, where she held the meat in her beak. On the ground, a fox came up with a plan for stealing the meat from the crow.

The fox proclaimed, “How beautiful is the crow! Oh, if only her voice were as splendid as her looks. Then she would be the queen of the birds.”

The crow, upset to hear the fox criticize her voice, let out a loud, grating caw as if to say, “How dare you attack my voice! It is majestic!”

In opening her mouth to show off her voice, the crow dropped the meat. The fox quickly grabbed the meat and trotted off, ignoring the crow’s raucous cries.

Q: What is the fox’s motivation, and how does he express this motivation?

_____.

Q: What is the crow’s motivation, and how does she express this motivation?

_____.

3. Apply Methods of Characterization: Hand out copies of the You Try It! Worksheet: “Characters: The Six-Fold Plan to Great Characters.” Have the students work through the worksheets, then ask them to report to the class what they came up with.

QUICK CHECK Ask students to identify and define the main types of characters. Have them explain the various ways they can convey the traits of their characters in their scripts. Finally, have them define character motivation, and to give examples of specific motivations that characters would have.

YOU TRY IT!

Characters: The Six-Fold Path to Great Characters

GOAL

Characters are the most important part of your script. You can have people fall in love. You can have them participate in grand historical events. You can even have them working to keep the whole world from blowing up. But unless you have characters that the audience can believe in and care about, your script is going to suffer. Make no mistake: having believable, powerful characters is the best way to help your script go far in Blue Nose Scriptwriting Contest.

DIRECTIONS

The Six-Fold Path to Great Characters

DIRECTIONS The best way to create characters that will make your script come alive is to make sure of six key things.

- 1) A main character must have a specific **goal**.
- 2) A character must have an **antagonist** who opposes her or him in that goal.
- 3) A character must have a **motivation** to pursue that goal.
- 4) A character must have a **point of view on the world**, and real opinions about what is right and wrong
- 5) A character must be **believable**.
- 6) A character must be **able to change**—either to grow, learn, and become better, or to become worse.

Work through the exercises below. Based upon the example, imagine characters that fill all six of these key aspects of character creation!

EXAMPLE

Character Name: Clive the Destroyer

- 1) Clive's Goal: To seize ownership of all the real estate in New York City
- 2) Clive's Antagonist: Mayor Joe Bill Rudy, defender of the common man.
- 3) Clive's Motivation: Clive has genetically engineered a pack of enormous dogs. Each of his dogs is three hundred feet tall. He has two thousand of them, and—a key point—all his dogs love to attend Broadway shows, and shop at the best boutiques. Unless he takes over New York, his pack of enormous dogs has threatened to eat him.
- 4) Clive's Point of View on the World: Might makes right. He has a pack of enormous, theater-loving dogs. Therefore, everyone else should get out of his way.
- 5) Clive's Believability: Clive grew up in a tiny studio apartment in the Bronx. He never had enough room growing up. Also, when he was a kid, his pet Chihuahua was beaten up by a Great Dane owned by the neighborhood bully. As a boy, he vowed to have plenty of room, and never to own a dog that would lose a dogfight.
- 6) Clive's Ability to Change: Clive can remember his boyhood. It is possible, just possible, that he will see that, with his enormous dogs, he has become exactly like the neighborhood bully of his childhood.

Exercise A

Character Name: _____.

- 1) _____'s Goal: To get a date to the prom with _____, the nicest guy (or girl) in the school.
- 2) _____'s Antagonist: _____.
- 3) _____'s Motivation: To win a bet with his/her friends that he or she can actually get a date with the person.
- 4) _____'s Point of View on the World: _____.
- 5) _____'s Believability: _____ comes from a family dominated by a highly competitive mother. Although he or she doesn't want to turn everything into a contest, he or she has been trained at home to never be able to back away from a challenge.
- 6) _____'s Ability to Change: _____.

Exercise B

Character Name: _____.

- 1) _____'s Goal: _____.
- 2) _____'s Antagonist: _____.
- 3) _____'s Motivation: _____.
- 4) _____'s Point of View on the World: _____.
- 5) _____'s Believability: _____.
- 6) _____'s Ability to Change: _____.

Self-Check

Look back over the characters you have either helped create (in Exercise A) or created from scratch (in Exercise B). As you create characters for your script for the Blue Nose Scriptwriting Contest, be sure that your characters have all the traits that were foregrounded in these exercises.