



The Lantern English Co.
The Creative Writer

Character Workshop: Heroes – Syllabus

Course Description: Your story relies on one main thing: its protagonist. In this in-depth character workshop, we'll discover what makes a strong hero and craft our own protagonists while exploring literature, history, and our previous works. As the course is focused on the student's character creation, highly individualized feedback and advice will be provided weekly along with the weekly grades.
Prerequisite: Creating Living Characters.

Course Outline:

Week One: The Obvious Question

Week Two: The Basics

Week Three: Relationships & First Impressions

Week Four: Character Growth

Week Five: Before the Conflict

Week Six: During the Conflict

Week Seven: After the Conflict

Week Eight: The Playground

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Creative Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.



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Lesson Four: Character Growth

SAMPLE LESSON

Does any one person stay the same forever?

The answer, of course, is “no.” Most likely, you are very different than you were ten years ago, let alone a year or even a month ago. All you need to do is look through an old photo album (or, now, social media memories!).

As human beings, we all develop and change as we gain new experiences. The memories we make and the people we meet shape us into the kind of people we become.

Of course, the same is true of strong characters, and that’s what we will discuss this week.

BONUS VOCAB LESSON –

As a bonus, we are going to give you a few character terms that we use in literature courses. They are a good way of defining your character’s growth.

E.M. Forster determined that there are **flat** and **round** characters. **Flat** characters are two-dimensional and generally uncomplicated, while **round** characters are complex, have a wide range of traits, and experience development throughout the course of the story.

Generally, **dynamic** characters develop or change during the story, while **static** characters say the same.

For this workshop, our goal is to create a *round* character who is also *dynamic*.

Now that we know what we are striving towards, let’s take a moment to evaluate *why* we want to achieve growth in our characters. Our character’s development should revolve around these goals, so they are vitally important!

WHY DO YOU WANT YOUR HERO TO DEVELOP? –

(No, “because my teacher told me to” is not a fitting answer. :))

- **Do you want to teach your reader a lesson?**
- **Do you want to make your hero more relatable?**
- **Do you want to make your hero become a more positive character?**
- **Do you want your other characters’ perception/opinion of the hero to change?**

These aren’t the only reasons why you might want to develop your hero, but they are some of the ones that we use most frequently. Spend some time to brainstorm what your goal is in developing your hero. Be ready to write it out in a sentence or two—that’ll be a part of your assignment for this week!

Example goal for a character named Edie Small: “I want my readers to learn that 1) not everything is as it meets the eye and 2) anyone can be involved in helping those in need.”

HOW WILL YOUR HERO DEVELOP?

HOW CAN WE LINK THAT DEVELOPMENT TO OUR GOAL? –

Now that we have answered the “why,” let’s look at the “how.” This will be something that will need to be very tailored to fit your characters and plot, but I can give you some ideas to jumpstart your brainstorming.

We have also provided an example for each idea of what the “link” looks like, using our character Edie Small.

IDEA #1: AN UNFORGETTABLE EVENT

One of the most common ways of having a character develop is through a notable event. Now, just because it’s “notable” doesn’t mean that the event must be melodramatic or overblown (“Ahh! My true love was transformed into an octopus by the dastardly Dr. Evil, who routinely mixes Skittles and M&Ms in the same bowl!”). It only needs to be unforgettable for your character. Maybe it is related to similar-looking candy, but maybe it’s the fact that someone broke her favorite teapot, or that her grandmother struggled with a particular illness.

Example Link: After Edie’s dad passed away (**notable event**), she struggled with her situation and tended to run away from the foster homes she was placed in. However, Chris’ family took a chance on her and always wanted her as a part of their family, even when she was difficult. It turns out that she was exactly who they needed, too.

This supports both parts of the goal: 1) Edie ends up not being what meets the eye, and neither is Chris’ family what she expects. 2) Chris’ ordinary family is able to make a huge impact on Edie’s life.

IDEA #2: AN INFLUENTIAL PERSON

Another classic mode of character growth is an influential person. This can go both ways—there can be a great relationship that teaches your hero to be heroic, or there can be a terrible relationship that makes him struggle with his goals.

Example Link: Edie meets Chris (**positive influential person**) through her foster care program. He’s one of the first siblings who seems to genuinely care about her and want her in his family, and he’s the one who will do anything he can to try to make her feel safe and not need to leave. He shows her what being “heroic” in the everyday looks like . . . and encourages her to actually do her homework.

Again, Chris is an ordinary person who does things that feel like second nature to him, but he makes a huge positive impact on Edie.

On the other hand, Edie also meets Andrea (**negative influential person**), the gorgeous school genius who loves putting others down . . . in such a clever way that she seems to get away with *everything*. (Of course, we aren’t insulting intelligent students in this story—Chris is also an academically-minded person.)

Here, Andrea seems beautiful and sweet, but has an ulterior motive. Like everyone else, though, she has a deeper motivation for her actions, even though that doesn’t make it okay.

IDEA #3: A PERSONAL REVELATION

Character growth doesn’t need to come from an outside source, however. Instead, your hero could develop through a personal revelation. This can be the hardest idea to make realistic, so *ensure* that it lines up with your character’s personality, past, and environment, as well as the plot as a whole. Yes, we would all love for Average Joe to miraculously understand all the mysteries of the universe, but our characters are human beings, albeit fictional ones.

To make a personal revelation more realistic, we would recommend that you couple it with an element of the previous two ideas. Maybe someone says something that, over time, serves as a wake-up call. Maybe your hero wakes up on the anniversary of an important event and realizes that she needs to do something different with her life. Maybe three spirits related to a famous holiday wake him up in the middle of the night and inspire him to be less stingy (thanks, Mr. Dickens).

WRAPPING UP –

This is a short lesson for a big topic, but unfortunately there is no “one size fits all” piece of brainstorming advice that we can provide for you. Instead, work through the assignment and the questionnaire, and feel free to email me if you need to bounce ideas off of someone! I would be happy to offer advice or suggestions before actually grading your assignment, and of course you will get feedback when you finish it.

Assignment 4: They'll Say That Your Character's Development Grew Three Sizes This Day

Complete the following four parts:

- 1. In at least one complete sentence, explain your goal in developing your hero.** (There is a similar question on your questionnaire from Lesson 2, so it's okay to modify your answer for that.)
- 2. Brainstorm the following questions and submit a brainstorming document like you did last week.** Again, it can be super rough; we will grade on content, not mechanics. (Minimum 100 words)
 - Do you want to teach your reader a lesson?
 - Do you want to make your hero more relatable?
 - Do you want to make your hero become a more positive character?
 - Do you want your other characters' perception/opinion of the hero to change?
- 3. Answer the “development” section of the questionnaire and resubmit.**
- 4. In a few sentences, explain how your character's development links to your goals.**
Review my examples if you need help.