

I hope you enjoyed the class! If you have questions or feedback, mail me at catrambo@gmail.com or check out my website for info on my writing community.

Creating Side-Characters

Your protagonist has all sorts of relationships, which can include friends, family, neighbors, teachers/students, mentors/mentees, co-workers/bosses/employees/customers, rivals, frenemies and a host of others, and this is often where your best side characters come from.

Popular ways that people think about interactions that you can use when creating and working with characters.

- Transactional Analysis
- The Satir Modes
- Introvert vs. extrovert (not an absolute category; these are two ends of a spectrum)
- Ambiversion
- Love languages
- Birth order

There are plenty of ways of sorting people; use one (or more!) to make sure your characters differ from each other.

One way to sort friendships

- Stranger - someone you've never met or are encountering for the first time
- Acquaintance - someone you've met enough times that you recognize them but you know few details other than their name
- Casual friend - someone that you have spent time with and who does know some basic facts about who you are
- Close friend - someone you have spent a great deal of time with and who know multiple facts about who you are, your background, and other details
- Intimate friend - someone with whom you have shared secrets or other intimate details

Close and intimate friendships are built of moments of intimacy, moments where the other person has been seen and recognized, both at their best and at their worst.

Some questions to ask of friend relationships:

- Where and when did the friendship begin and what are the moments that have made it move from one category, like acquaintance, to another, like casual friend?
- Where did the time spent together come from; what are the shared experiences?
- What are the layers of in-jokes and common references?
- How much trust exists in the friendship? What moments have built or destroyed trust?

- How much validation do they give each other? Is it conditional in any way?

Friendship is made up of multiple components. Here's four vital ones.

- Trust:
- Support
- Fills some need:
- Social validation (the single best predictor of friendship)

Questions to ask about friendships:

- Where did the time spent together come from; what are the shared experiences? Did they come together voluntarily or as a result of circumstances? Did the group have any shared antagonists or allies?
- What are the layers of in-jokes and common references? What are the key phrases they can seed into a communication to tip each other off?
- How much trust exists between them? (Remember that trust levels may not be reciprocal.) What moments have built or destroyed trust? What deliberate acts have they made in order to build trust?
- How much validation do they give each other? Is it conditional in any way?

Group friendships

Ask:

- Why did the group emerge?
- Who is in it?
- What do they do together?
- How do they interact and influence each other?
- Is the group's style competitive or cooperative?
- What happens when there are internal or external problems or challenges?
- How do they share resources and information?
- How do people outside the group perceive it? Is membership in the group desirable?
- Who in the group holds the most prestige? The least?

Also figure out the roles in the group:

- Who is the leader of the group and who is next in line?
- What challenges do they face to their authority?
- What is the source of the leader's power?
- Is there someone who is definitely the lowest status member of the group? How is this expressed?

Other kinds of friendships

- "Couple" friendships

- Codependent friendships
- Online/internet friendships which can be one-sided
- Toxic friends
- Friends of other species

Things that deepen friendships:

sharing an interest or goal; working together; supporting each other through illness or loss; planning and taking trips together; regular visits; shared experiences like celebration; sharing a secret or embarrassment and having it accepted and not betrayed; involvement with each other's families; shared moments of excess or weakness. Overall, time and gestures of affection and support deepen friendships.

Things that harm friendships: a lie or betrayal; bragging; dependence; neglect; minimizing the other person's experiences or expertise; not recognizing the other's emotions; competition; outside stresses; changes in values; insulting each other.

Family Relationships

Parents influence a child's basic values.

Children may model their behavior after a parent's own behavior, ranging from the small to the large.

In thinking about a character's childhood and their parents, think about what are the moments of trauma, the wounds their inner child will carry as adults? What are the things that wake them up in the middle of the night, or that they would never tell anyone? What guilts and shames will haunt them? What things will they take pride in, later on in life? What are the elements they can never walk away from? What are the things their parents taught them were worth pursuing -- and what things were to be ignored?

Families are more than parent and child most of the time; there are often siblings, and sometimes parents and grandparents have siblings as well.

When thinking about sibling relationships: What are the moments of shared trauma -- and who is responsible for them? What are the wounds their inner child carries? What are the things that mean family to them? What do they view as their responsibility to their siblings -- and along the same lines, what responsibilities or duties do they feel those siblings owe them in return?

Children may be adopted, or otherwise brought into an extended family, and sometimes childhood friends may find a second family this way. Many families have "honorary" relatives, close friends who are considered part of the overall family.

Some additional questions to ask about your character's family:

- Who tells the stories in your character's family and when/where/how do they tell them?

- What does your character know about their family history and how do they know it? Who are the heroes from it that they might emulate or want to find out more about?
- What are the things that are usually unspoken in a family, the secrets, and at what age did your character first become aware of them?
- What things are celebrated in the family; what holidays are valued and what happens on those holidays?

Questions to ask about your character's family problems:

- Who does the family acknowledge to not be trustable?
- Who are the keepers of the family stories and secrets?
- What does the family see as its overall characteristics? What does it pride itself in?
- What are the ancient grudges held in the family and who holds them?
- What patterns have been inflicted across generations? (Along the same lines, what patterns have been bestowed from one generation to the next?)
- If there are addictions, how are they excused or enabled? How does the addict secure their supply?