

## Character Exploration Initial Writing Exercises

These writing exercises are designed to draw out hidden and submerged story ideas and to play with spontaneous writing as a tool in creating stories.

This was tailored for kids who are largely uninterested in writing in long spurts, so each exercise was kept to five minutes (which was a stretch for some even still). But writings like this could easily be for 20 minutes in good instances.

It went like this:

Choose a character from one of your stories. Make a brief sketch of that character, write his or her name down.

Explore the character in the following timed writing exercises of five minutes each. Important is to write slowly, and keep your pen or pencil moving. Write the images and ideas that appear in your head as you relax and try to focus on seeing the character.

Don't stop writing. If you get stuck, write "WHAT IF" and continue from there, allowing your writing to take surprising turns. In other words if you are writing, "John the ape is blue with scales and is moving slowly down the hill towards the town," and then get stuck, try "WHAT IF." For instance, "WHAT IF he is not walking, but he is sledding down the hill, on a giant billboard..." In other words, let your ideas and images change to something different, even if they seem ludicrous.

Important: GOOD IDEAS and BRILLIANCE are not the goal here. Just stirring up your imagination and letting the elements of your story appear and evolve rather than appear full-bloom and forced is the objective.

Write on the following for five minutes each. Keep your pen moving during each one, and use, "WHAT IF?" to get yourself unstuck if you need to.

1. Write something the character wants. It can be world peace, the end of evil or a glass of water. It could be as simple or grand as your imagination wants it to be. Write the first thing that comes to mind, and let it change as you follow the train of thought. By the end of this five minutes, you may find that your character wants something different than you originally believed.

2. Describe and envision your character's LAST fight or argument with another character -- it can be a mother, an enemy, a friend, a grocer -- whomever. Just imagine an argument or fight, and imagine that this is the FINAL time this fight will ever happen. Describe it visually or with dialogue if you like. Just remember to see it in your mind, write slowly and follow the imagery you see. Write what you see.

3. In the same way, describe the character's death. Imagine how you see the character living his

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or her last moments. You are not defining the character's entire story arc here; you are merely playing with the POSSIBLE ways your character might die. Use "WHAT IF..." if you get stuck. You may find yourself describing numerous deaths for the same character. All this writing reveals more about the personality and drive of your character.

4. In the same way as above, describe an imagined CHILDHOOD SCENE.

5. Briefly make a list of objects in the character's pocket, backpack, in his car, or something he is holding. Make a list of possible objects. Begin with one of them and describe a scene with that object. Is your character giving it to someone? Receiving it? How is she using it? Who else wants it? Again, don't answer these questions directly, just describe a scene.

-- Contributed by Tom Hart