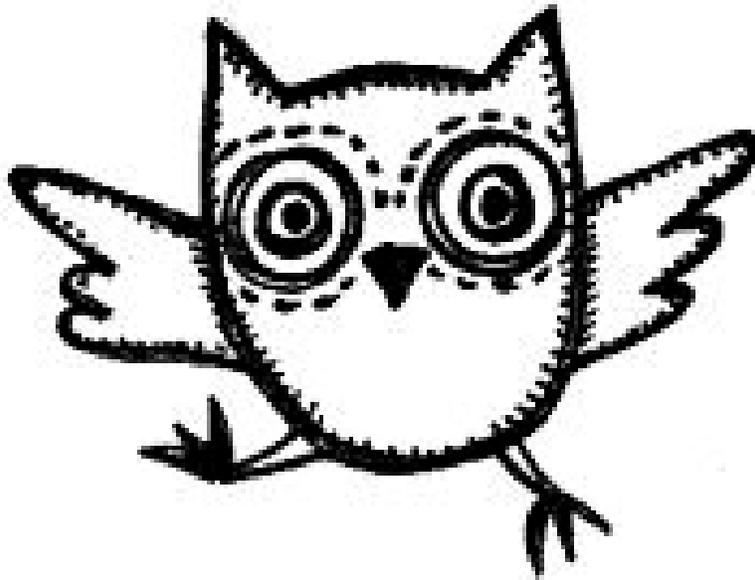


Creative Writing Workshop Grades 1-5

Fun With Character Building



Introduction to Creative Writing



In this writing workshop, you will be given the tools you need to provide your 1-5 grader with the tools needed to start learning to write stories. The exercises are all fun, and all developed to help them begin to master the building blocks of creative writing. Creative writing is different from other kinds of writing that students learn to do, and is unequalled in its ability to foster a love of language and storytelling. Conventions of writing such as grammar, punctuation, sentence formation and paragraph format take a back seat to creating and telling fun tales with unique characters. That is not to say that you cannot use these exercises to reinforce the language skills your students are learning, only that they should be used secondary to the creative aspect of this program. The introductions will provide a solid basis for you, the teacher to understand what each section is about, and to understand its importance to the young writer. These activities can all be adapted to different levels of skill. It is important to note that even though these lessons will provide a benefit to all, some children are going to be more interested than others and some will find new ways to let their imagination soar. Critique of their writing should be kept to an absolute minimum during the creating process. Your role through this program is to guide them through the process. Ask them questions, get their brains churning, but do not be so quick to hand out suggestions. Creativity is a muscle that grows stronger and better with use. Most of all, this workshop is meant to be fun, rather than more work to be "gotten through". Enjoy!

*Worksheets with **Red** titles are geared for 1-3 grades. Worksheets with **Green** titles are geared for 4-5 grades.

Character Creation: Introduction



What is your favorite part of a story? One of the first things that people love about stories and the thing they often remember the most are the characters. From Pippi Longstocking's iconic braids to Dr. Doolittle's unique ability to talk to animals to Anansi's mischievous pranks, characters live on in our hearts and minds long after we close a book. Characters are the people we identify with and those we love and hate, depending on their role. To help your students learn to write compelling stories, the first thing they must learn is how to create characters. Of course, a 1-3 grader's ability to make a character is not going to be the same as a 4-5th grader, or a high schooler. Character creation takes on many roles. The activities provided are merely a small sampling of the ways characters can be created.

Before beginning to work with your students on character creation, take a moment to talk to them about their favorite characters. Depending on your setting, use a blackboard or even a piece of large paper to make a list of their favorite characters. For this exercise, the characters can be from stories or even from film and television. Begin with a simple list of favorite characters. 4-5 is a sufficient number, although if they choose to list more that is fine too. After they have come up with their list ask questions to find out what they love and remember about those characters. Special skills, the ability to tell a good joke, even a shortcoming that they have are all possible answers to these questions. The purpose of this exercise is to help them realize that certain traits make these characters memorable. On the next page, you will find a sample of what examples might come from such conversations, as provided by my own children, a first grader, a second grader and a fifth grader. You will see that the things we love about characters tend to be the things we wish we ourselves possessed.

Favorite Characters Example:

My kids were asked about their favorite characters- These are a sampling of their favorite characters and what it is they love about those characters. They would have gladly continued listing characters as long as I sat here. You can see from their answers that the younger kids had more simple answers- they see an item as memorable, or a physical characteristic ie "they are pretty" or "they can fly" where the older kids will have more in depth answers that generally have the words "like me" somewhere in the answer. It is amazing what you learn about kids by an exercise like this.

Bad Kitty- Because he is bad and funny.

Cassie from Animorphs- She resembles me. She loves animals, she is a peacemaker and is called a treehugger.

Tinkerbell- She is a fairy because she can fly with pixiedust and with her wings. She likes to tinker and I do too.

Skippyjonjones- He thinks he is a Chihuahau but he is really a cat. He is different than the other cats.

Love-Me Bird- She is always calling out "Love me love me" and I think she would sound pretty if she was real.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles- They are funny and they fight bad guys. They always help each other. They are all brothers and they fight just like we fight with our sisters. They all have fears and they turn out to be funnier than they thought.

Sophia the First- She is a princess and I want to be a princess. She has a special necklace.

Pokemon characters- They each have different personalities and sometimes they are funny, sometimes they are just plain mean. They resemble different animals that I like.

Jake and the Neverland Pirates- They have a ship that moves and does stuff by iteself. They meet lots of friends.

Jack and Annie (from Magic Tree House)- They don't have any weapons, but they are brave and they always get what they need and they never give up.

Rainbow Fairies- They all have pretty colors and they have magic wands.

Naming Characters

You will find I have included two different sheets to help with naming characters. One is geared for 1-3 graders, the other for 4-5 graders. It is not uncommon for younger kids to name characters after real life friends, family members, colors and characters they have encountered before. For older kids, they begin to realize that they have control over creating an entirely new character and they revel in that freedom. To assist with the character naming I would suggest keeping a couple of old baby name books on hand that older kids can browse through. Those name books will be used for the naming activity, and although a computer internet search can also be used, there is something to be said for using books to help with this process.

I suggest providing students with a booklet they can record their favorite names in for use later. This can be nothing more than a piece of construction paper folded over some blank sheets. Label this book "Name Book" or something similar. We will have another book for story ideas, but this one should be specific for names. They can doodle a little picture next to the name, add any ideas they may have for that character and write down name meaning. Learning to add things to these books will help them keep building creativity and will help them record great ideas they may not be using at the time.

It may seem silly to teach kids to put random words together to make names, but that is exactly how most names started. It will be a funny exercise for them to play with, so expect to hear giggles as they come up with nonsensical names.





Naming Characters

1. List your favorite colors.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

2. List your favorite animals.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

3. List your favorite toys.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

4. List your favorite names.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

5. List your favorite snacks.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Combine two of the words above to make a name for your character.



Naming Characters

1. List your favorite colors.

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A. _____

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C. _____

4. List your favorite names.

A.

B.

C.

5. List your favorite snacks.

A.

B.

C.

Combine two of the words above to make a name for your character.

A.

B.

C.



Naming Characters (Sample Answers)

1. List your favorite colors.

- A. *Blue*
- B. *Orange*
- C. *Red*

2. List your favorite animals.

- A. *Dolphin*
- B. *Squirrel*
- C. *Dog*

3. List your favorite toys.

- A. *Blocks*
- B. *Ball*
- C. *Teddy Bear*

4. List your favorite names.

- A. *Rose*
- B. *Frank*
- C. *Jesse*

5. List your favorite snacks.

- A. *Goldfish*
- B. *Apples*
- C. *Gummy Bears*

Combine two of the words above to make a name for your character.

Frank Orange

Blue Rose

Gummy Bear Squirrel



Naming Characters

1. List your favorite names.

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

2. Using a baby name book, list 4 new names and their meaning.

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

3. Create names no one has ever used before.

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

4. List 4 words that could be used for names.

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

5. Take your 4 favorite names from the list above and change their spelling.

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

Circle your favorite name. If you have not already, either look up its meaning, or assign it a meaning.



Naming Characters (Sample Answers)

1. List your favorite names.

- A. *Amy*
- B. *Phyllis*
- C. *George*
- D. *Howard*

2. Using a baby name book, list 4 new names and their meaning.

- A. *Adain (winged)*
- B. *Lew (lion)*
- C. *Sarff (snake)*
- D. *Wynnifred (white waves)*

3. Create names no one has ever used before.

- A. *Shavir*
- B. *Rhould*
- C. *Melvynne*
- D. *Allysiytre*

4. List 4 words that could be used for names.

- A. *Rainbow*
- B. *Brittle*
- C. *Frogspawn*
- D. *Poison*

5. Take your 4 favorite names from the list above and change their spelling.

- A. *Poysyn*
- B. *Lywe*
- C. *Aymee*
- D. *Stavur*

Circle your favorite name. If you have not already, either look up its meaning, or assign it a meaning. *Adain- Winged*

Designing Characters

Coming up with a character concept is often the first step in making a character come to life. For younger kids, often the best concepts are ones they can see so drawing can be a very efficient tool of adding details and life to a character. For older kids, a detailed questionnaire can get them working on sleuthing out those important details that create a memorable persona.

Encourage your students to add extra details to their characters, and to explain what impact those characteristics have on personality, abilities, handicaps and special skills. A character who has an extra leg might be teased by his peers but through the scope of a story could end up saving the very people who teased him most. By adding in "flaws" to the character, your student will help to place themselves in the heart of the story.

We all have flaws in ourselves, both real and perceived. It is through watching characters overcome these flaws that we find a kinship with stories and begin to see ourselves not as limited but as uniquely equipped to live the lives set before us.

No matter how unrealistic you might see your student's character descriptions, please remember the goal of this exercise is not to be stuck within the limits of reality, but rather to build creativity. If they create an inch-worm character that is 87 feet long, that is fine. Do not criticize their character building, but let them instead have free rein to create their own characters.



Design Your Character



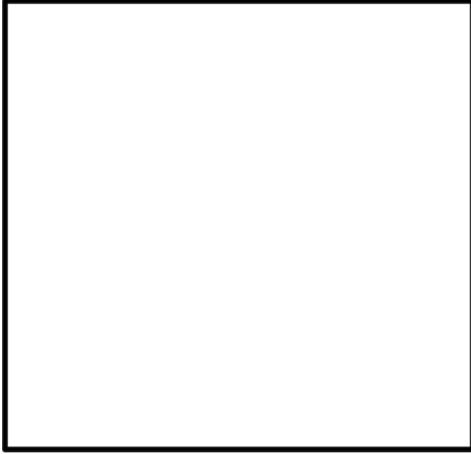
What does your character look like? Draw a picture of him or her in the box above. Be as detailed as possible. In the space below write a brief description of your character.

Design Your Character



What does your character look like? Draw a picture of him or her in the box above. Be as detailed as possible. In the space below write a brief description of your character.

Design Your Character



Draw a small portrait of your character.

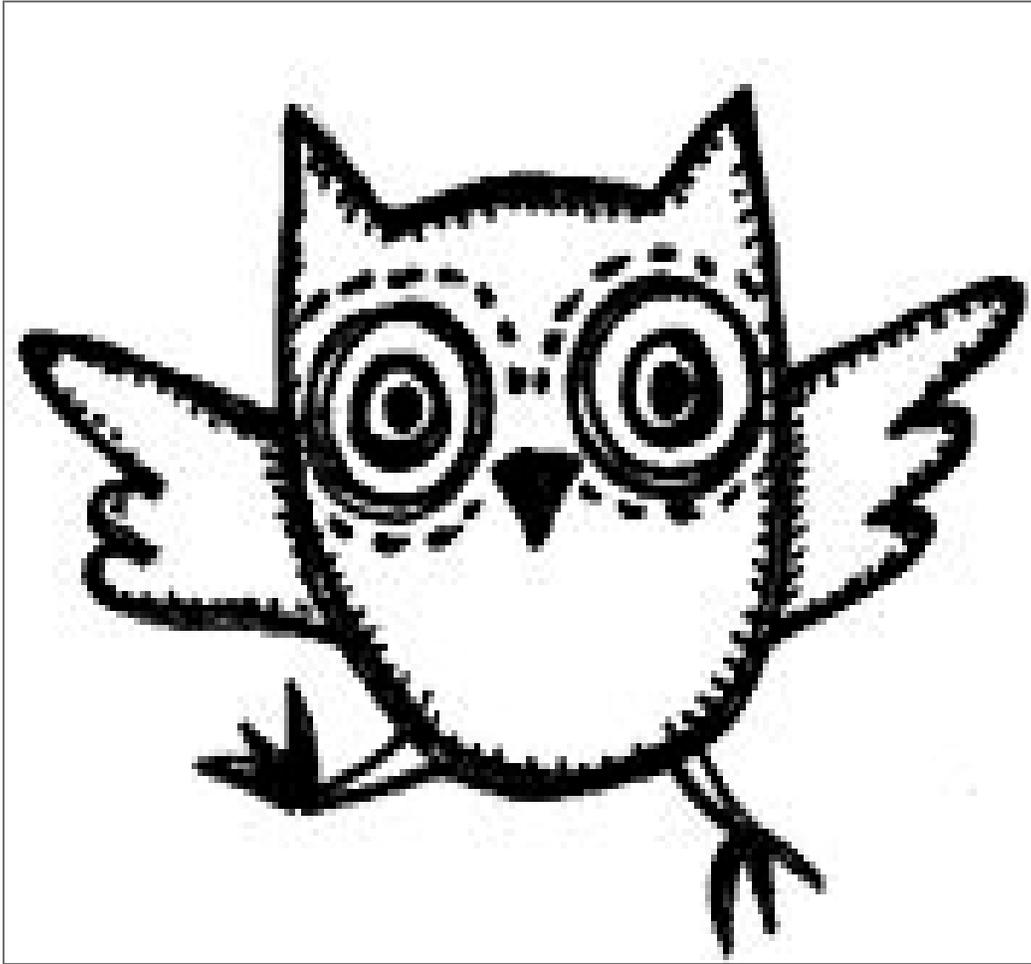
1. Character name: _____
2. Character age: _____
3. Species of character: _____
4. Character's family: _____

5. How tall is your character: _____
6. How much does your character weigh: _____
7. Hair/feather/fur color: _____
8. Eye color: _____
9. Character hobbies: _____

10. What makes your character different from others around him: _____

11. Where does your character live: _____
12. What does your character see as a flaw in himself: _____

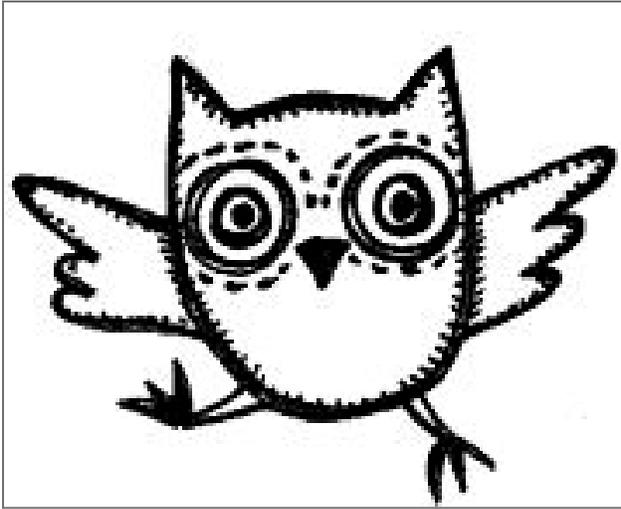
Design Your Character (Sample)



What does your character look like? Draw a picture of him or her in the box above. Be as detailed as possible. In the space below write a brief description of your character.

She is an owl. Her feathers are blue and purple. One of her eyes is bigger than the other eye. She likes to dance and is clumsy. She falls out of trees a lot. The other owls tease her. Her name is Blue Gummy Bear.

Design Your Character (Sample)



Draw a small portrait of your character.

1. Character name: *Adain- It means "Winged"*
2. Character age: 8
3. Species of character: *Owl*
4. Character's family: *Adain has an older brother and a younger sister. He also has two parents.*
5. How tall is your character: *Adain is 2 feet tall.*
6. How much does your character weigh: *Adain weighs 58 pounds*
7. Hair/feather/fur color: *Adain has rainbow colored feathers, purple eyes, one yellow foot and one orange foot. His toenails are 6 inches long.*
8. Eye color: *Purple eyes*
9. Character hobbies: *Adain likes to read about ships. He also likes to have leaf races with the other owls down the river.*
10. What makes your character different from others around him: *Adain is afraid of heights. He wants to learn to swim instead of flying. He dreams of being the captain of a boat.*
11. Where does your character live: *Because he is afraid of heights, he lives in a burrow at the bottom of a tree.*
12. What does your character see as a flaw in himself: *He feels like his family is disappointed in him.*

Designing A Home For Characters

Much the way characters can be drawn and designed, so too can their homes be drawn and designed. Where a character lives tells you a lot about that character. A girl who lives in a treehouse certainly has a different story than a girl who lives in a cottage. A lion who lives in the zoo will have a different tale to tell than a lion who lives on a savannah. Likewise, an owl who lives in the top of a tree will be a different sort of owl than one who is afraid of heights and who lives in a nest on the ground at the bottom of a tree.

For the purpose of story writing, a home is where the character spends the most time in the story. So if the story takes place in a school, the "home" may be their desk or locker. If the story takes place in a grocery store, the "home" might be a shopping cart. It is important that young writers learn what setting can tell about a character. The biggest strength a creative writer has lies in their ability to show the reader- not tell them.

Example: Max opened the door to his bedroom, or tried to. The door swung in only 6 inches or so before jamming against a pile of clothes and toys. Butting his shoulder against the door, he was able to get it open enough to squeeze in. Where was his baseball? He was going to be late for the game if he didn't hurry. He could hear the other kids in the neighborhood yelling and playing, and he wanted to be out there with them more than anything. But where was his baseball?

From the above example you can see that Max is a messy boy who loves baseball and playing outside. Because of his pigsty bedroom he is prone to losing his toys- even his favorites. That is a much more interesting look into his life than writing: *Max had a messy room and lost his toys. He wanted to play outside but couldn't find his ball.* Both examples share the same information, but the first is much more entertaining to read.

Younger writers will tend to write straightforwardly and will have descriptions much like the second example above. The goal through building their creativity is to teach them to eventually have the ability to write in a less direct and more "picture" based approach. Looking at samples of stories for the different age groups you will see that the first example is more typical of what you would find in the books 2-6 graders read, namely chapter books, while the second sample is more

typical of a picture book. That is because as books get harder to read the authors rely on words to paint the pictures. The more practice you get reading and writing in this manner the stronger your ability to recreate the technique. So as with the rest of this program keep in mind the capabilities of your student and allow them to progress from direct telling to writing that paints a picture.



Below find two more example of telling vs showing. The first is appropriate for younger students still reading mainly picture books. The second one is an example of what a student might find in a chapter book. Both tell the story of Rose, a messy girl who loves to paint, but while the top one would rely heavily on a picture to go with it, the bottom one IS the picture.

Example: Rose had trouble keeping clean. She loved to play in the mud, and she loved to paint. The messier she could get, the better she liked it. Picture day was today! She dressed in her pretty new dress. Her mother sent her up to her room to get her backpack. Rather than get her backpack like she was asked, Rose decided she had time to paint one more picture before the bus came to pick her up. She splattered paint onto the paper and onto her new dress! Oh no! What would her mother say?

Example: Rose wiped her paint smeared hands across the front of her dress. She knew she was supposed to wear an apron when she painted, but she never could seem to remember. She reached up, with one rainbow colored hand, for the paintbrush she usually kept tucked behind her ear. The paintbrush was not there. She saw her backpack laying by the door, half opened and suddenly remembered sticking it inside the night before. As she was digging through the backpack, she saw the yellow flyer reminding WEDNESDAY IS PICTURE DAY! Oh no! It was most definitely Wednesday and now she did not have time to change clothes before school. Her mother was not going to be happy!



Design Your Setting



What does your character's favorite place look like? Draw a picture of it above.



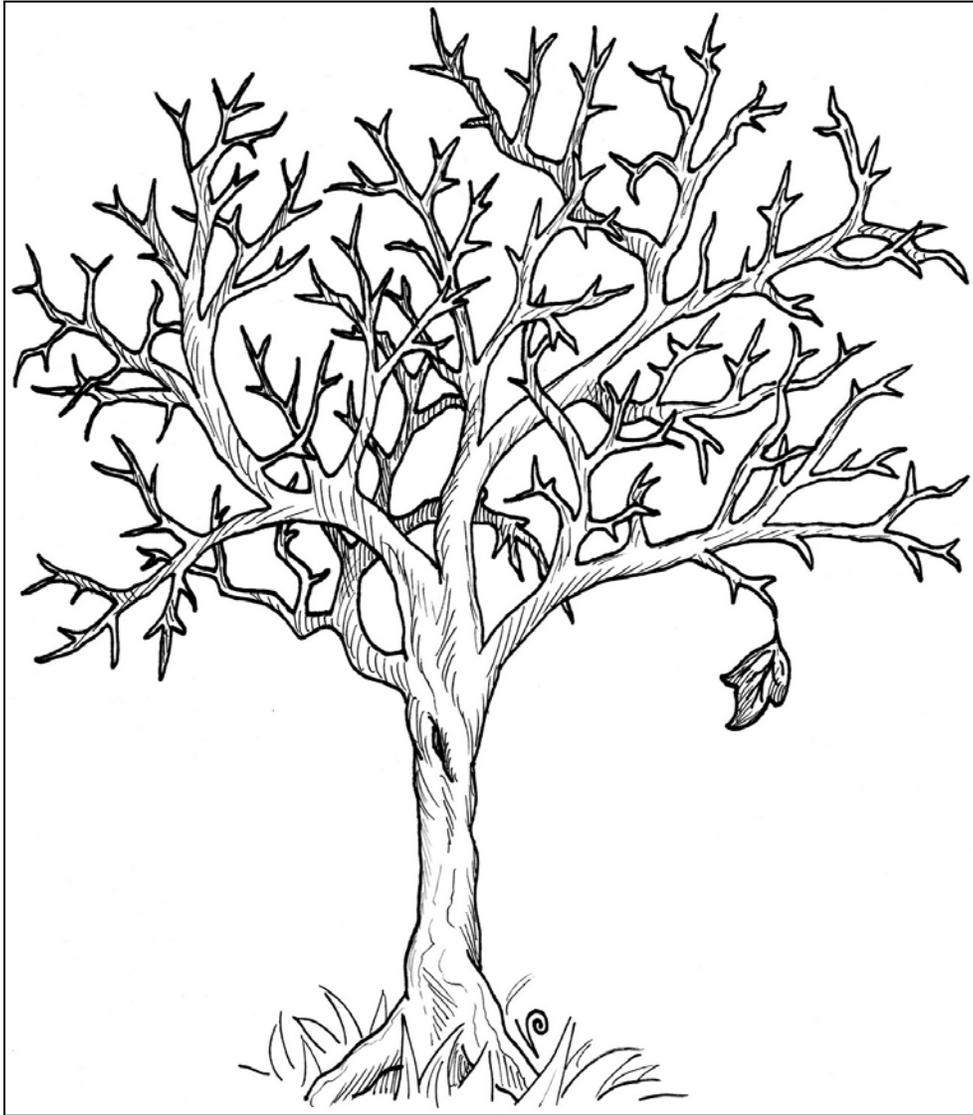
Design Your Setting



What does your character's favorite place look like? Draw a picture of it above.



Design Your Setting

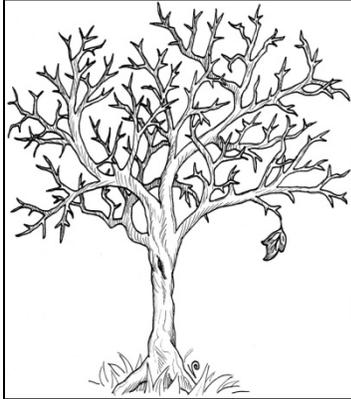


What does your character's favorite place look like? Draw a picture of it above.

Blue Gummy Bear lives in a tree. It has no leaves because it is fall. She lives at the top of the tree but she falls off the branches a lot.



Design Your Setting



Draw a small "snapshot" of your character's favorite place.

Using your character in action, "show" your reader what your character's favorite place looks like.

Adain sat at the bottom of the large oak tree. If he craned his neck he could barely make out the hole where the rest of his family slept. Fall was in the air, and only one lone leaf shivered in the breeze. Adain knew how that leaf felt. All summer he had been able to stay warm in the thick grass at the base of the tree. But now that the weather was turning, the grass was thin and brown, spindly before it gave way to the snowfall that was coming soon. Why did he have to be afraid of heights? Why did he have to be born an owl at all? Owls were supposed to make their nests high above the ground in the shelter of tree holes. Adain was suddenly very jealous of his brother and sister, warm and nestled in the cozy hole with their parents. Instead of being up there where he belonged, he was down here on the ground. The other forest animals had been whispering about a snake in the area. Up in the tree with his parents he would have been safe. But the ground was snake territory, and Adain huddled against the rough bark of the tree, too afraid of every rustle to sleep.

Friends and Families of Characters

Another important aspect for your characters are their friends and family. Our interactions with those around us tell a lot about our personalities. The same is true of characters. Is your character a loner? Does he want to be popular but find himself on the outskirts of popular groups? Or is your character always surrounded by friends, even though sometimes he wants to just be left alone? These are good questions for your students to consider. Other questions include- Is your character part of a large family or a small one? Are her parents the ones raising her or does she live with grandparents or an aunt and uncle? Is your character's family made up of people who are related to her by blood or adopted family members?

A fun example to look at is *Meet the Robinson's*. The main character is motivated completely throughout the film by feeling as though he is missing out because he doesn't have a family, not realizing that desire for a family will strongly shape his future. Other more classic examples include *Cinderella* (How did her family relationships influence her story), *Hansel and Gretel* (How about their family relationships) and even more contemporary models like *Skippyjonjones*, *Piggy and Elephant*, and the little llama from *Llama Llama* are shaped by their relationships with family.

Equally important to many stories are friends. Classic examples are the gangs you find in story series like *Franklin* and *Arthur*. Or what about the interactions between the kids in *Mrs. Frizzle's class* in *The Magic Schoolbus*. Their fights and friendships influence each and every adventure they go on. Spend some time with your student and brainstorm stories where friends and family play a large role. Unless your character is on a deserted island all alone, these interactions will play a part. And even the castaway will be influenced by the absence of family and friends.





Character Friends and Family



What does your character's family look like? How about his friends? Draw them above.



Character Friends and Family

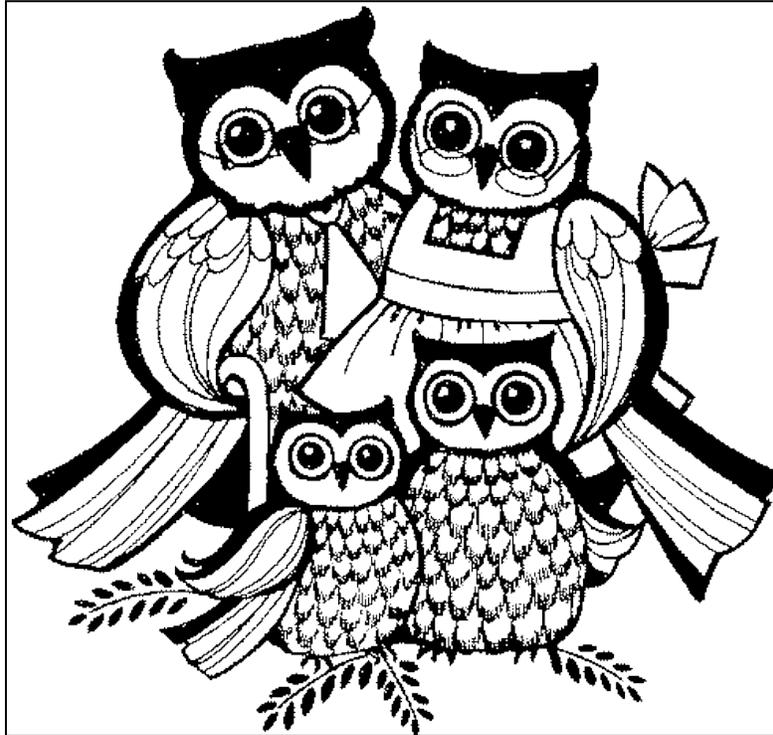


What does your character's family look like? How about his friends? Draw them above.

Four sets of horizontal writing lines, each consisting of a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line.



Character Friends and Family

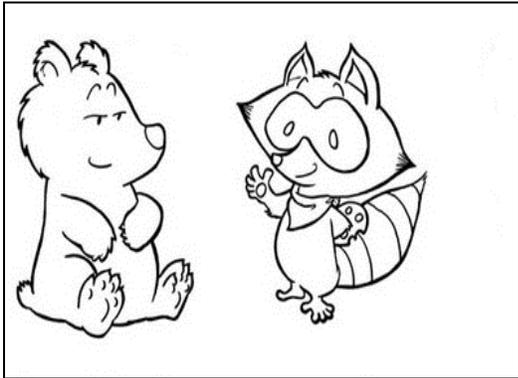


What does your character's family look like? How about his friends? Draw them above.

Blue Gummy Bear lives in her tree house with her mama, papa, sister Rainbow Toes and her brother Slime Ears.



Character Friends and Family



Draw a small "snapshot" of your character's friends or family. Using your character in action, "show" your reader how your character interacts with his friends or family.

Adair was sitting under his tree reading a book when his two best friends, Bern Bear and Rocco Raccoon came strolling by. Bern was carrying his stick sailboat under his arm. Rocco had his in a pouch over his shoulder. Adair was glad to see them. His morning had been too quiet, and he really wanted to get in some play time before Mama decided he needed to help with chores.

"Hey Adair, you want to go float boats on the river before lunch?" Rocco called out, giving his red necktie a jaunty tug.

"You know it," said Adair. "I just need to make sure it's okay with Mama." He looked up at the nest hole where Mama was reading a story to his little sister. Now how am I going to get her attention, Adair thought. While he was still thinking over this dilemma, Bern set his boat on the ground.

"You want me to climb up and ask?" Bern rumbled. Before Adair could answer, Bern bear-climbed up the tree's trunk, poking his snout in the Owl Family hole. "Mrs. Owl," he said. "Can Adair come with Rocco and me to the river? I promise we will be back before lunch."

Adair could hear his Mama hoot with surprise, then she said something softly to Bern. Bern slid down the tree, a big grin on his face. Adair knew that grin could only mean that Mama had said yes. He skipped a little as he gathered his own boat, but deep in his heart he wished he wasn't so scared to fly up the tree and ask for himself. What Mama must think to have such a scaredy-owl for a son.

Character Collage

For this activity your student will need a piece of construction paper, either a normal 8X12 or the larger construction paper, a tube of glue stick or bottle of glue, a pair of scissors and a stack of old magazines. Your student will need to be on the look out for any pictures that remind them of their character. It can be food their character likes, furniture from their house, pets they may have, clothes they would like to wear, or anything that even remotely reminds them of their character. If they find other pictures that they want to use for future projects that is fine. I like to provide young writers with a manila envelope to keep their magazine finds in. Kids of all ages can do this project. Once they have all the pictures they can use, have them glue the pictures to construction paper and label it with their character's name. They can also draw in items if they could not find something suitable in the magazines. Projects like this are important as they help work many parts of the creative process. They are also great work on spatial recognition, cutting skills and pasting skills.





Character Collage Sample



"Blue Gummy Bear"



Character Collage Sample



"Adair"

Character Collage

Through the activities in this program your student should have come up with a fairly solid character for use in a short story. They can write their story at any time during this program, but encourage them to complete this range of activities to learn as much as possible as they can about their characters. Remember the purpose of this workshop is help kids experience the fun side of writing. Each young writer is going to have to figure out which method of creation works the best for them. The important thing is that they learn that unlike other writing styles there is no right or way to go about it. The workshop is designed to be the first of several creative writing exercises out there, but it can certainly be used all on its own. It is my hope that you as the teacher will see from the examples given how to guide your student in using these activities as building blocks to take a vague idea and create a three dimensional character. These skills take practice, so neither you nor your student should be disheartened if first attempts do not yield a polished result. I can always be reached for extra help at mhenson@fishhoo.com. It is my hope that each child should experience first hand the joy of language and of storytelling.

