

Fact of Story Writing 4

Story writing is all about how your character changes.

The kind of changes in characters that we're looking for here are changes on the inside, changes in how characters feel about themselves, their lives, and their world. What is your character like at the beginning of your story?

How is your character different at the end? What lesson does your character learn?

Tips on How Characters Change

Think “inside” as well as “outside.” When we think of how our own lives change, we often think of things like being older, looking different, living in a different city, or going to a different school. These are the obvious things and they do represent important changes for us. But when it comes to writing a great story, these kinds of changes are not the most important.

The most important changes take place on the “inside.” These changes are all about how we feel, what we believe, how we think. Here’s how it works. There are things we want. In the course of trying to get these things, we go through a variety of experiences. Because what we want is important to us, the experiences of trying to get it are important to us, too. As we go through important experiences, we learn new things, and as we learn new things, we change: we end up thinking differently and feeling differently—on the inside—about ourselves, our lives, and the world we live in. ***This kind of change in your character is what makes for a great story.***

How people are on the inside. Think about your character changing in some way on the inside. Maybe your character will become happier or more trusting or more hopeful. Perhaps your character starts out with these good feelings and by the end, he or she feels scared or confused. Characters don’t have to feel better; they just have to feel different. And that difference has to be important to the character, to you, and to your readers.

If you write your characters well, your readers will identify with them. They will, at least in part, feel the same way your characters do throughout your story. That’s part of why people find stories meaningful, full of importance, value, and inner significance.

Show the change, don’t just “tell” it. You could tell your audience about how your character changes just by saying something like, “Tyler felt sad at the beginning, but later he felt happy.” That’s short and to the point, but it’s very boring as a story. It’s better if you can “show” your audience the change instead. Think about how your character feels, then think of something he or she can do (or not do) to represent how the character feels.