

Memorable Characters



We remember Sherlock Holmes because he has a distinctive physical appearance, a distinctive way of speaking, and a unique personality. For the same reasons, we easily recognize his companion, Dr. Watson.

Characters are what they do. I recommend Orson Scott Card's book *Characters & Viewpoints* (Writers Digest Books) because it offers thorough advice on developing unique characters.

Characters develop as you write them. Sometimes you think you know who they are—and they're usually an amalgam of people you know—but our characters surprise us and take on a life of their own. However, once you've got a good idea of your characters, flesh them out.

Physical description: Age, size, shape, eye color, hair color, skin color, unique features (scars, moles, misshapen features, over-sized hands, etc.).

Background: Education, economic upbringing, religious background, major life events, ethnicity (example: "Mildred dropped out of high school when she turned sixteen to have a baby, but when it was stillborn, she grieved while her former classmates graduated, then completed a GED before attending the local community college's police academy. In other words, she learned more than her peers ever could before finishing college.")

Habits & Patterns of Behavior: Sherlock smokes his pipe or plays his fiddle when he thinks—these are habits that set him apart from other characters. He has a catch phrase ("Elementary, my dear Watson") that also reveals something about his smug, condescending character.



Miss Marple is a fictional character appearing in 12 of Agatha Christie's crime novels and in 20 short stories. Miss Marple is an elderly spinster who lives in the village of St. Mary Mead and acts as an consulting detective. Alongside Hercule Poirot, she is one of the most loved and famous of Christie's characters and has been portrayed numerous times on screen. The character of Miss Marple is based on Christie's step grandmother, or her Aunt (Margaret West), and her cronies. Agatha Christie attributed the inspiration for the character of Miss Marple to a number of sources, stating that Miss Marple was "the sort of old lady who would have been rather like some of my step grandmother's Ealing cronies – old ladies whom I have met in so many villages where I have gone to stay as a girl."

Abilities & Special Skills: What abilities (or disabilities) does your character have that either makes him or her especially capable of accomplishing the tasks needed to overcome the conflicts in your plot, OR that hamper and impede the character? For example, early in my book ***First Folio***, I casually mention that Joe sometimes takes his daughter Katie climbing at the indoor Rocknasium. Later, he's being chased by a relentless killer and escapes by climbing the steeply pitched roof of the Campanile bell tower on the UC Berkeley campus. The reader buys that he has both the skill and hand strength to achieve this because he trains routinely. However, a flaw or disability can add a complication to the plot line. For example, if the character has a fear of heights but has to climb the fire escape on the outside of a high rise, then that's another impediment that he or she must have the courage to overcome.

MOTIVATION: Finally, always know your character's motivation, even if (or especially if) you do not make it explicit in the story. Your knowing as the author is more important than revealing it because it will inform your writing in ways that will make it authentic. Hamlet's motivation is both his love and admiration for his father, as well as his disgust of his uncle and his desire to avenge his father's death; however, he is also hindered by his own intellect and conscience, which is what causes the delays that eventually bring about many of the collateral deaths.

About the Author

Scott Evans holds a Master's in English from the University of California, Davis, and teaches at the University of the Pacific in Central California, including fiction writing and a course titled "Crime, Punishment and Justice" that introduces first-year students to criminology from various perspectives. In the summer, he also teaches legal writing for the King Hall Law School's Outreach Program at the University of California, Davis. Before returning to California, he taught at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, which is one of the settings in his "literary" murder mysteries.

He serves as Editor and Publisher of the ***Blue Moon Literary & Art Review***, a journal that has featured work by New York Times best-selling authors John Lescroart and Rick Mofina, as well as Hollywood actor Patrick Kilpatrick.

For more great writing info and to learn about his works of fiction, visit his author website, <http://scottevansauthor.com/biography/>.