

How to...



Bring your characters to life



Holly King-Mand

Holly King-Mand was nicknamed "the nation's favourite English teacher" after helping thousands of pupils with online lessons during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Parents and guardians can find out more about Holly's brilliant interactive online classes at hollysclassroom.com

This week we look at how to create imaginative and intriguing characters in your writing. The trick is to describe and develop them so that your characters take centre stage and really bring your fabulous stories to life. Here are Holly's four top tips and tricks that will make your characters come alive – and keep your readers' attention.

1 What's in a name?

What do you call your character? Naming your character is actually really important. A character's name can give your reader clues about them. They can communicate the period in history your character comes from. They can identify where they come from and paint a picture of their personality. Mary McTwinkletoes, Walter Whiff-Waff, Simon Smartypants and Katie Cackler – these names all give us clues about the characters. Can you work out what they are? Another little trick you can try out is to use alliteration (when words begin with the same letter). Many characters you already know use alliteration to make their names memorable, such as Severus Snape, Willy Wonka and Gangsta Granny.



2 Follow expectations or smash them?

Archetypes are character types we know already and recognise. You will probably have read stories and fairy tales with wicked witches, terrifying trolls and cunning foxes. Using archetypes helps to create a character that your reader can understand quickly, for example a miserly banker or a handsome prince. What happens when you break the stereotypes (the expectations of these characters), though? This can make your character much more interesting. So why not add some twists? Your character could be a witch who can't cackle or a squirrel with an allergy to nuts. A little surprise will make your character shine.



Bring your character to life with these top tips.

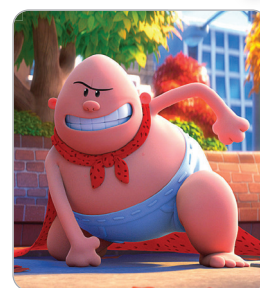
3 How do they move?

Thinking about the way your character moves or does everyday things can give your reader a sense of their personality. Using verbs and adverbs will help your reader visualise your character. For example, instead of writing "went", you could write "stomped", "swaggered" or "shuffled" to describe how they walked. Adverbs are another way to give your readers clues on how your character does things: maybe your character always "tiptoes nervously", "creeps carefully" or "burps loudly".



4 What are their quirks and flaws?

Everyone loves reading about characters who are interesting and unique, as well as the flaws that make them human (just like the rest of us). Consider which quirky behaviours or flaws your character might have. For example, can they speak 12 different languages? Do they always slurp their tea? Are they a champion chess player? Or maybe they are absolutely terrified of... toilets. Don't forget to weave your character's flaws, quirks and superpowers into your story.



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