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**Characterization Exercise: Through Another’s Eyes©**

**By Caroline Allen**

I’m sure you’ve heard of perspective and Point of View in creative writing. Who tells the story is of crucial importance. People can see the same event in many different ways. My background, personality, culture, physical health, spiritual outlook and many other factors influence how I assess any event. When I look at a clear-cut forest on a mountain drive, as I examine the tree stumps and the field littered with broken branches, I always think: so many people would see this clear-cutting in so many different ways.

I see it as a void, not death, because death is full of life, but an emptiness. The ecologist might wonder about all of the animals whose habitat had been disrupted, and think about where those animals are now. A logger might see it as profit, or might have grief that logging is so restricted these days and his livelihood has been severely disrupted. A Native American might see it as the disruption of a sacred site. And the list goes on.

The same can be said of our stories, right? The events in our stories will be seen by each character involved in very different ways. Leaving aside the concept of a *right* or *wrong* way to view the events, as a creative writer, the exciting part is exploring the different ways your characters see different events.

When doing characterization, many writer’s fill out a characterization sheet. Such a sheet is available under the Free Resources tab on my Art of Storytelling website, [www.artofstorytellingonline.com](http://www.artofstorytellingonline.com). However, we need to go beyond thinking about the character intellectually; we need to think about more than just integrating things like hair and eye color. You must inhabit the very flesh of the character if you are to be a successful professional writer. Again this is why I chose to avoid trauma for my creative writing lessons; it can be excruciatingly difficult to inhabit the flesh of someone who was abusive, and even dangerous. So please do this exercise with care. Even if you’re doing it around someone who is loving, this can still draw up a lot of emotion.

This is just the beginning of the perspective and Point of View (POV) lessons in creative writing. Imagine writing an entire novel in another character’s perspective. If you’re a woman, imagine writing an entire novel through a man’s POV. There are many different levels to understanding this concept of characterization, including lessons on how to write powerful dialogue, about capturing the voice of other characters, and lessons on the character arc of each character. But for this exercise, let’s just start by trying to enter the flesh of one other character in the story, and seeing the event through their eyes.

1. Choose a character from the story you wrote in the first writing exercise on my Earth Advanced Book Group Guide page. Do not choose yourself. Write the story from this other character's perspective. This will be a sloppy, messy, stream-of-consciousness exercise, so don’t try to be perfect, just get the story out of you. We’re just splashing around, having fun and getting our feet wet. Writing in different character’s Points of View is a technique many novelists use. Think of all the novels you’ve read where the author tells the story through several characters’ eyes. Understanding POV is essential in creative writing. This exercise is a fundamental way to begin to understand how a story changes when it’s seen through another character’s eyes. It’s also a spiritual exercise, meant to help us get outside of our own heads, our own stories and our own needs, and see a situation from a different perspective. Such an evolved perspective will help all of your creative pursuits. This exercise will not be a story you use in any way (unless it evolves into something you want to use). It’s just exploratory. This is a great exercise for beginning writers to understand what it means to fictionalize characters.
2. What epiphanies did you have around your understanding of this other character? Can you add that to the story? How does it change your understanding of what your story is about?
3. Can you apply this lesson to other characters in the story, as well? Even simply letting yourself ponder what the other characters are thinking is a good idea. Soon you’ll find your story opens wide, and there’s so much information you can barely keep up with it as a writer.
4. Characterization applies to you, as well. Start to ponder yourself. How can you convey who you are, from clothes to hair color, to the way you perceive things? Doing exercises like this showed me that I am very mystical, and I see the world through this veil of mysticism, and that not everyone sees things the way I do. Some see the world through much more practical terms, and that started to help me piece the puzzle together of our different view points in many events in my life. Understanding how you view the world, and owning it, helps you release others to view the world the way they want to, and helps you understand the story you are telling, and even take that story to a more epic level.
5. Integrate new found insights into your story.

 (As a final note: I believe when we choose to take on a particular person in our writing, to characterize them, to ponder their views, to understand them deeply, we take on not only our own healing, not only healing that reaches out and touches this other person on a deep level, but generational healing. The work you’re doing here is important. Don’t be surprised if it can feel quite overwhelming or intense. You’re healing the past seven generations and the next seven generations! This is the real work of your life, and it will be important and it may not be easy nor quick.)