

What is a character?

Business



I sit in my plastic train seat, plugged into my earbuds and another world. My eyes are trained on an unoriginally drab advertisement plastered along the subway car's inside, but in my peripheral vision I am actually taking mental notes on the woman perched under it. Straight honey hair falls over the side of her face, covering her eye but allowing a snippet of it still open to the public. The other part is covered by the book she is nose-deep in. All on display is an array of freckles and one very intense eye, zooming and flickering after each word it scans.

Beside her, sporting a similar swarm of freckles across his cheeks, sits a young boy with black curls and hazel eyes. I imagine him to be her son. I imagine them discussing book lists at the table. I imagine her reading bedtime stories to him as a small child. I imagine their house, in its clean paint but creatively messy kids' rooms, toys and books sprawled out among modern furniture. I imagine the rest of the family, maybe another child or two, another father or mother, a dog, some fish, an in-law who comes by every now and then to stir up trouble.

Their story is writing itself in my head, and whether or not it lines up with their true lives is irrelevant. I have already made their profiles for myself, and the level of truth is not so crucial because I have created characters. Characterized (making puns is not out of character for me) by Dictionary as, “ the aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of some person or thing” and “ an account of the qualities and peculiarities of a person or thing,” a character is a sort of reputation. And, for me, I can agree. But there is more to it. A person's character lies within their nature,

reputation, individuality, expression – their self, essentially – but that is in the case that it is true.

There exists the character that every real person is; the character that every fictional person is; and the fictional character that every real person is.

Subconsciously or knowingly, whether we are writers or observers or creators or simply regular life-livers, we make characters out of every person we come by. Distinctive details characterize one's appearance, but the rest thrives in the eye of the be-characterizer. We make characters of people every day, and from a writer's eyes this is especially true. A character is a creation. A character is not a mere reputation, personality, nature, spirit, or even essence of a person, but the story we (the on-looker) spin up about that person, no matter what aspect of that characterization is real or fictional.