

Creative Writing Invitation #7

Character Development and "Dialogue" Part 1:

Please read these two passages of dialogue by Ernest Hemingway:

"What should we drink?" the girl asked. She had taken off her hat and put it on the table.

"It's pretty hot," the man said.

"Let's drink beer."

"Dos cervezas," the man said into the curtain.

"Big ones?" a woman asked from the doorway.

"Yes. Two big ones." The woman brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. She put the felt pads and the beer glasses on the table and looked at the man and the girl. The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.

"They look like white elephants," she said.

"I've never seen one," the man drank his beer.

"No, you wouldn't have."

"I might have," the man said.

"Just because you say I wouldn't doesn't prove anything."

-- from Hills Like White Elephants

The door of Henry's lunch-room opened and two men came in. They sat down at the counter.

"What's yours?" George asked them.

"I don't know," one of the men said.

"What do you want to eat, Al?"

"I don't know," said Al. "I don't know what I want to eat."

Outside it was getting dark. The street-light came on outside the window. The two men at the counter read the menu. From the other end of the counter Nick Adams watched them. He had been talking to George when they came in.

"I'll have a roast pork tenderloin with apple sauce and mashed potatoes," the first man said.

"It isn't ready yet."

"What the hell do you put it on the card for?"

"That's the dinner," George explained. "You can get that at six o'clock." George looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter. "It says five o'clock."

"The clock says twenty minutes past five," the second man said. "It's twenty minutes fast."

"Oh, to hell with the clock," the first man said. "What have you got to eat?"

"I can give you any kind of sandwiches," George said. "You can have ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver and bacon, or a steak."

"Give me chicken croquettes with green peas and cream sauce and mashed potatoes."

"That's the dinner."

"Everything we want's the dinner, eh? That's the way you work it."

-- From The Killers "

Discuss with your lab teacher the characters and situations implied by these conversations. What do you know without it being stated directly? What is the mood between the characters in each passage? What is their relationship? How do you know? After you discuss these, read the rest of this invitation, and then you'll write. . .

Part 2: When readers imagine characters in a story, they generally want to know what the characters look like, how they're feeling, and what they're doing, thinking or saying. All of these help move the story along, developing a plot which reaches a climactic point and is followed by a resolution to the conflict.

Characters play a very important function in any story. Their actions can show the reader a lot about what is going on, and characters' words help establish the story's tone, plot and any conflicts between characters.

For this invitation, you can create "internal dialogue" (monologue) of a character and describe his or her physical attributes as well. Pick somebody you know or have seen. Describe the person, then write what he or she might be thinking. It can be anything. Remember, this is creative writing where there are no rules. Your character could be thinking about another person, a delicious Thanksgiving feast, or merely zoning off. This is free-writing, so once you're established who your character is, start writing and don't stop.

Another option is to create a dialogue between two people who are arguing. Don't tell your reader that they're arguing, instead, show the tension through the words in the dialogue. Spoken words can create mood as well as pushing the story's plot along.