



BRANDILYN COLLINS

Getting Into Character: Seven Secrets a Novelist Can Learn from Actors

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Proven techniques for creating vivid, believable characters

Want to bring characters to life on the page as vividly as fine actors do on the stage or screen? Getting into Character will give you a whole new way of thinking about your writing. Drawing on the Method acting theory that theater professionals have used for decades, this in-depth guide explains seven characterization techniques and adapts them for the novelist's use.

In this unique and practical book, you'll discover concepts that will help you understand and communicate the behavior, motivation, and psychology of every fictional character you create. Examples from classic and contemporary novels show you how these techniques have been used to dazzling effect by Jane Austen, Mark Twain, Steve Martini, Anne Rivers Siddons, and others. These simple yet highly effective techniques will help you:

- * Create characters whose distinctive traits become plot components
- * Determine each character's specific objectives and motivations
- * Write natural-sounding dialogue rich in meaning
- * Endow your characters with three-dimensional emotional lives
- * Use character to bring action sequences to exuberant life
- * Write convincingly about any character facing any circumstance

Getting Into Character: Seven Secrets a Novelist Can Learn from Actors Details

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Debra Daniels-zeller says

This is a great useful book with lots of exercises and examples that can give your characters more depth. My favorite sections include: subtexting and emotion memory. Each chapter open with an actor's technique and the novelist's adaptation, about using your own experience and accessing memories for story. Lots of great ideas in this little gem of a book.

Carrie Daws says

I learned so much, and still have lots to process, from reading through Brandilyn Collins's book. Her secrets are easy to understand, yet will take a lifetime of writing to perfect. If you want to create better characters, this is a great place to find hints, strategies, and insights.

Emily says

Absolutely incredible. Be ready to focus, think, and highlight or take notes, because this book contains priceless concepts for writers that cannot be found anywhere else. I will be referring to its riches again and again as I hone my craft.

Rose says

Quick review for a quick read. Oh, this was a good one. Very well organized and appropriate link to how writers can employ actor's techniques in helping them craft their fiction. I was fascinated by the premise of this book, so I took no hesitation in picking it up. The book revolves around describing seven techniques that actors use to convey their performances of character, and Brandilyn Collins expands on these techniques to show how writers can make their characters (and stories) more effective by using a step by step process for each consideration.

The seven "secrets" this book expounds upon are:

1. Personalizing
2. Action Objectives (Four Ds - Desire, Distancing, Denial, Devastation)
3. Subtexting
4. Coloring Passions
5. Inner Rhythm
6. Restraint and Control
7. Emotion Memory

Much of this text was a refresher to me for techniques that I employ, because I always say that the best stories can provide you a vivid sense of showing the dynamic of a story playing out in you mind.

Personalizing had to do with shaping the character and individual aspects that make them stand out. Action Objectives had to do with the character's desired goal through the narrative, and breaks it down into Desire, Distancing (how far the character has to reach or what barricades block them from reaching the desire), Denial (character questioning ability to reach goal, and Devastation (optional, but ultimately the character not being able to get what he/she wants).

Subtexting covers everything that a character isn't explicitly saying, but is implied or beneath the scene in dialogue among other measures within a scene. Coloring Passions is self-expansive, as it deals with conveying the dimensional passions of a character. Inner Rhythm means showing the progression of a character's emotions and roots. Restraint and Control shows appropriating techniques that match the intention of a scene (action scenes requiring shorter sentences, etc.) Last, Emotion Memory relies on how events can shape the emotional landscape of a character, and how an writer can use their own emotional memories to shape their characters.

It's definitely a book I would recommend picking up for any writer that wants to deepen the portrayal and experiences presented with the characters in their stories.

Overall score: 4/5 stars.

Hannah Conway says

Brilliant! She's such a master at character development and weaving a story that pulls the reader in!

Lee Howell says

I have just finished reading this book. Even though I bought it a while ago I wished that I had read it sooner. It gives clear and thoughtful explanations that help you easily understand what a good book should feature when written. It compares the lessons learned from actors and reports how a novelist can use these same lessons learnt successfully as features in their own writing. It shows you easily how you as a writer can train your self to incorporate these ideas by giving you easy techniques to follow and study examples to read. In my opinion it is well worth the money and therefore I award it the five stars it deserves.

Stefan Emunds says

All stories are subjective. 100%. A good fiction author doesn't tell a *story*, he describes how characters react to situations, people, and things. Otherwise, he would describe his reaction to said situations, people, and things ;-). That's why the prime exercise of any fiction author is bringing his/her characters to life. This book tells you how to do that using seven (secret) principles derived from Stanislavsky's techniques of "method acting." The book is to the point, easy to digest, and comes with shinging examples.

Steven says

Excellent book on characterization. At the start of the chapter for each of the seven "secrets" there are two

paragraphs: "Actor's Technique" and "Novelist's Adaption" and that provides a great roadmap for what you will learn in the chapter. Just really good instruction here with exercise and samples to make it all sink in.

Vicki says

A must read for novelists!

Thinking that actors are the cousins to writers was an interesting idea. There is so much to learn about writing from examining method acting. What I loved about the book was after she explained the particular secret, she gave different examples, *and* included a follow-up. So even if you missed the point in the example, she drove it home with her commentary afterward.

Best quote: Strong writing requires an intimate knowledge of humanity.

Adam Ross says

A great book that uses acting methods to explore the dimensions of your characters. As one who was a theater minor in college, this really helped me understand my characters.

Dave Smale says

Highly informative

Terrific use of method acting and how it translates to writing fiction. More than mere lessons on sentence structure and concise language, Collins truly causes the reader to introspect. I highly recommend this to all novelists, aspiring or multi-published.

Taka says

Lacking in depth--

When I found this book, I was ecstatic because I had been meaning to study Stanislavsky's Method acting to enrich my fiction. I started reading it with gushing enthusiasm.

What a disappointment.

Granted, the author does offer some interesting advice, but over all, it is thoroughly disappointing for its lack of depth and complete failure to deliver what it promises (e.g. "Through releasing the sensations of your own experiences, emotion memory allows you a surprising glimpse into souls whom you may have though you could never understand. You can then enlarge these 'glimpses' until you create a complete portrait of a character"). The author adapts techniques from Method acting to fiction use but does not delve enough into

each technique to be even practical.

Chapter 1, for example, presents one of the most important techniques: personalizing. That's where you get to know the "core value" of your character. Unfortunately, the author gives paltry examples of this process and pretty much leaves it up to the reader to decide how to come up with specific mannerisms stemming from the core value.

Chapters 2 and 3 - Action Objectives and Subtexting - are so commonsensical and natural that only true novices may benefit from reading them. Moreover, Chapter 2 is a poor rehash of Robert MaKee's *Story*, and the overall message of Chapter 3 can be summarized as, "Think about the context when writing dialogue." She even coins a cute, wholly unnecessary acronym - WISIWIG conversations - and flatly contradicts her urge in Chapter 7 to "compress" (why not conversations without deceit? Or straightforward conversations? instead of such an idiotic acronym?).

Chapter 4 is probably the only descent chapter in this book and may be of some interest to beginning to intermediate writers. Her tips to use contrasting emotions to emphasize a particular emotion is quite useful, but the author fails to grasp the far-reaching consequences of this technique (see Donald Maass's concept of "micro-tension" in his *The Fire in Fiction* for superb elaboration).

It is so unfortunate that Chapter 5 does not explain what in the world "inner rhythm" is in plain language. Without a clear definition, the chapter becomes very much confusing. The technique of beating out the rhythms of certain moods and activities is VERY interesting, but the author does not provide adequate accounts of this technique. Specifically, the author does not explain WHY we need to beat out two different rhythms at the same time and how what our bodies go through can be used to create mannerisms for our characters. Neither does she explain how we can specifically "TRANSLATE" our reactions for each character. It is just too bad, because this could have been VERY useful.

It is unclear how Chapter 6 (Restraint and Control) has ANYTHING to do with Method acting as it goes over very basic writing techniques of sentence rhythm and choosing the right word to effectively describe actions and scenes (or what the author calls "compression").

Finally, the chapter on "emotion memory" does not illuminate the MOST CRUCIAL process of how "enlarging" the "seed" of your emotional experience and "translating" it according to each character works. She just quotes another famous acting teacher and gives an detailed account of how she killed a bug, and WITHOUT showing us HOW she transformed this seemingly insignificant account into the psychology of a murderer, she ends the chapter and gives us useless "study samples" from Mark Twain that only show how authors use their own experience to create characters (DUH).

Overall, not worth the price at all.

Tim Suddeth says

Great tips on how to deepen the characters in your story. The author uses good illustrations for each point. Very helpful and readable.

Kirstie says

A good look at creating greater depth not just in the creation of characters, but the portrayal of them, how they affect the plot and vice versa, and how to write stronger prose in general using the techniques originally best known to method actors.

I liked the multiple examples of actual texts (not just the authors own works but others also) for eachn and every 'secret' so you could best see how they were properly employed.

Cindy says

What I liked about "Getting into Character" is that the author breaks down what most books on writing leave vague. Brandilyn Collins provides examples of what she is trying to convey to authors on writing quality. These examples help set in and reconfirm her advice on writing techniques. The topic's provided in this book are unique; Coloring Passions, Inner Rhythm, Restraint and Control and Emotion Memory, these are my favorite topics from the book. Brandilyn Collins was able to hit on the mark these topics without having to follow her around on a goose chase; direct and to the point. I give this book five stars for the unique, direct, and applicable advice.
