Getting to Know Your Character
When I’m getting to know my characters, thoughts about them come to me in all sorts of ways and at the craziest times. Sometimes I see an interesting person or situation, and I want to write about that. Sometimes I watch a movie that inspires me. Even overhearing a conversation on BART has given me ideas. My ideas can come from anywhere. I have to keep a notebook of all that shows up in my imagination. (If I don’t have my notebook with me, I take notes were ever I have to and then transfer the notes to my notebook later. Napkins, notecards, notes in my phone, email myself...whatever it takes.)

Read more on another mini lesson with suggestions for keeping track of and developing your ideas and inspirations.

Get to know your character like you would a new friend, a teacher or coach, or someone very important to you.

The more time and heart you put into knowing the character, the stronger and more engaging your story will be. Not everything you know about the character’s sketch will be written into the story, but it can all be sensed and conveyed in some way or another. The “or another” is usually through subtext, but we’ll get to that later in the lessons.

Just like people, characters are sort of a collage of their personality, past experiences, emotions, memories, opinions, cultures, and perspectives. When it comes to characterization even their physicality – what they look like, how they dress, how they move about, everything physical can be used to add to the character development and showing their true nature. Characterization can other come from other characters’ opinions, insights, and observations of the character in consideration.

In the first lesson we talked about the main character, the protagonist, having a want/goal and need/weakness (usually of a psychological and/or moral nature) to overcome. Here are a couple of ways to start learning about your character enough to figure out what her wants/needs are.

1) Archetypes  2) Backstory

Archetypes
Archetypes comes from a Jungian theory about...


No silly. Jung like...well I can’t think of word that sounds like Jung right now. (My Aunt Camille says pretend like you’ve put the word “young” in a Tibetan singing bowl or tossed it on the side of a gong.)

Anyway, Carl Jung was a psychologist who believed that more than people each just being individuals we all make up a collective. (’Course lots of indigenous people all over the world have known this throughout time, but...let me not get too sidetracked.) Jung convinced a lot of people since his day, that our collective “unconscious” also creates and recreates certain characters whose basic character traits
are the same from one art form, one culture, even century, or story to the next.

So, for example, a hero is an archetype; so is a princess, a mentor, a clown and so on. Each of these archetypes share identifiable characteristics.

There is even an artist archetype, so, there you go; you’re an archetype too.

Here, Girl. Check out this blog and video about Mr. Jung.

**Understanding the Collective Unconscious**

**Carl Jung – What are the Archetypes by the Academy of Ideas**

Gustav is deep, huh?

I know it’s a lot but, like my aunt says, you’re going to come across Jung in college, so you might as well learn something about him now. Plus, we’re Cinnamonogirls and we’re going for excellence. We can learn it and then use whatever works for us, and let go of the rest. Hmmm...kinda like an “alchemist archetype.”

What do you think about his theory? I know we don’t have to take him at his word, but I like the idea of our collective unconscious. We’re all people right? It makes sense that our stories and characters would be connected to each other somehow.

Either way, you can use archetypes to help you get to know your characters.

Talk to your characters. Ok, maybe not out loud because then people might think you’re a lil loco, but... My aunt says, “during your quiet moments, talk to yourself in “your mind’s eye” or imagination.”

**If you have an idea about a story, start to see who the characters are in that world. Name their archetypes and play with what traits that might give them.**

Don’t worry warlocks, hustlers, zombies, busters and bad guys... The collective unconscious has you covered too. There are even shadow archetypes, which gives you...you guessed it...traits for antagonists.

Like with my story, “Carmen and the Karma of Invincibility,” I started with wanting to learn about my character Carmen. She’s obviously my protagonist. I went through a bunch of archetypes and traits on Pinterests.

**Pinterest search on archetypes**

I discovered that Carmen is a s/heroe or heroine; she just doesn’t know it yet.

I know my other characters’ archetypes too, but you’re going to have to read the story to find out which ones.

You’ve been exposed to archetypes for a long time and all over the place, you just might not have known what they were there. Sorta-like my little brotha’s Pokemon Go. They’re everywhere. I found lots of archetypes in my latest favorite book Children of Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi. Start looking out for them and learn their names and traits. I promise you’ll start seeing them everywhere too.
I get it. Show what you know.
As you read, screen shows, go to the movies, hear family stories, name the archetypes that are reflected in each character.

Ask yourself, what type of archetype do I want to write about?
Ok, I can hear you saying what I said at first. Archetypes are cool, but if we all use them, won’t all of our characters be the same. Sort of...possibly...but only if you make them cliché.

Remember learning about clichés in English class... an idea, metaphor or something that’s sooooooooo good, it gets used soooooooo much by ery’body and their mama. That’s ok for every day talk, but if you’re creating something unique you don’t want to rely on clichés. (By the way ‘everybody and their mama’ is an example of a cliché that might’ve heard outside of English class.)

Beyond cliché how to create characters that fascinate
Next level – advanced

The Difference Between Archetypes, tropes, and cliches
Here’s a cool video I like about creating strong female characters. The woman in this video says ignore writing from archetypes, but... you have to decide for yourself what helps you.

It’s by Trope Talks at Overly Sarcastic Productions
Warning – Curse word alert. The narrator uses one, bad word; it starts with bad and ends in three letters.