CREATING CHARACTERS FOR STORIES

In Robert McKee's book *Story*, he says:

CHARACTERIZATION is the sum of all observable qualities of a human being, everything knowable through careful scrutiny: age and IQ; sex and sexuality; style of speech and gesture; choices of home, car, and dress; education and occupation; personality and nervosity; values and attitudes - all aspects of humanity we could know by taking notes on someone day in and day out.

This is CHARACTERIZATION... but it is not CHARACTER.

True CHARACTER is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure - the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation, the truer the choice to the character's essential nature.

Beneath the surface of characterization, regardless of appearances, who is this person? At the heart of his humanity, what will we find? Is he loving or cruel? Generous or selfish? Strong or weak? Truthful or a liar? Courageous or cowardly? The *only* way to know the truth is to witness him make choices under pressure to take one action or another in the pursuit of his desire. As he chooses, he is.

- What we are looking at in the next few exercises is what Robert McKee would describe as **characterization**. But first, think about what he says. He claims you can separate characterization from something he calls **character**. Do you agree?

When creating a character, you are trying to make up a person your reader can believe in. Characterization is an important element of that.

Usually, you will be looking to invent a character who is:

Believable – readers need to be convinced that such a person could exist.
Involving – some aspect of the character needs to draw in the reader's interest.
Visual – the reader needs to be able to 'see' the character.
Original – even if the character is based on an archetype, s/he should not be a stereotype.
Consistent – this doesn't mean characters need to be predictable, or that they always behave in the same way, but their behaviour needs to fit who they are. If they act 'out of character', there has to be a proper reason for that.

- Think of example characters from stories and dramas you've enjoyed. Are there any who don't fit these five criteria?
- Do you think these five criteria apply to flat characters as well as to rounded ones?