



Breathing Life Into Your Characters: How to Give Your Characters Emotional & Psychological Depth

Rachel Ballon

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Psychotherapist Rachel Ballon teaches the reader how to use the principles of psychology to understand their characters better. Through a mix of instruction, examples, and writing and visualization exercises, readers learn how to tap into their own stories and emotions to create realistic, complex characters.

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From Reader Review Breathing Life Into Your Characters: How to Give Your Characters Emotional & Psychological Depth for online ebook

Jason Koivu says

Ballon's book is almost more about psychology than writing, which was what I was looking for. The need to add detail to layer your fictional creations is driven home time and again...in fact, once or twice I thought I was rereading the same chapter. I don't know that this book is what every writer needs, but as long as what you're writing includes human characters, reading it can only be an asset.

Winston says

This reference book offers so much great insight when it comes to character development, and I highly recommend it. The author has a PH.D and is a psychotherapist, what more credentials could you ask for; it's the equivalent of getting advice on writing from a "New York Times Best Selling Author". Invest in it.

Liza says

Creating characters based on psychology sounds like an interesting premise, but Ballon's theory is that to truly connect with a character you must connect with your own emotions. Many of her exercises have the reader asking themselves how they feel and memories to arouse certain situations.

You're either going to buy the idea that to create fully fleshed characters you need to be one with your emotions or you're going to believe the whole concept to be hokey.

I kept a middle of the road approach, while I didn't necessarily agree with all her assertions, a lot of what Ballon wrote was very useful and helpful in creating multi-dimensional characters even if some of her exercises that involved my past and feelings were a bit silly to me.

If you can get past the pop psychology bits, you'll get a lot of helpful information out of the book. I most appreciated her section on dysfunctional families and the explanations of personality disorders and those with mental illnesses. Those chapters were an excellent starting point for anyone who wants to create a multifaceted character and universe.

If you're like me once you get past chapters 2-3, you'll find this to be a great writing resource. However, if you believe in her theory than this become will undoubtedly become a favorite of yours.

Linda Leon says

This is one of the best books I have read on character development. Her style is rather repetitive but I think

she does that to nail in her concepts. What I liked about the book is that she teaches the importance of analyzing your character as if you were doing a psychological profile - like you were a detective or being involved in criminal investigations. When I read the chapter on creating the evil/bad guy protagonist I could literally feel chills. Would recommend.

Monica Rodriguez says

Breathing Life into Your Characters has been a terrific help to me in improving my WIP (work in progress). The information was laid out clearly with great examples, and exercises followed every section so you could try out what you just learned. To the very end I was returning to my manuscript to use what I had learned. Without a doubt, my characters will be fuller, more real creations because of Ballon's book.

Leena Chandan says

Well crafted book for fiction writers especially those facing procrastination

Donald says

I took my time with this one and should probably go through it again. It reads like an overview on Psychology — call it Psych 101 — and less like a book on writing. That is precisely what I was looking for.

There are exercises throughout the book, none of which I followed. But they are there. Perhaps on a second pass.

What I really wanted from a book like this was the idea of melding dialogue with subtext, emotions and mannerisms, and ideas on the escalation of a psychological issue along with all the fixings; and still keeping it real. I'd like to think that reading this book once would be enough to give me all that and more. But I'll read it again.

James says

This is one of the two best books that I've read on character development for writers.

Lisa says

There's a lot of very good thought-provoking material in this book, but I had a difficult time moving through it because the approach taken is to first look at oneself and the experiences we've had in our lives, write them down so that we can immerse ourselves in the sensory details of that experience, and then apply the same

technique to a character we're creating. How we wrote about ourselves is how we need to let our character write about him- or herself.

I think it would be a very helpful resource for anyone who's interested in taking that approach, but I prefer to immerse myself in my characters to start with and draw on what I feel when I 'become' them on the page.

Kevin J. says

Great book on the Psychology of humans, a must have for any writer!

Jaymi says

As a fiction writer, I'm charged with creating characters that my audience will enjoy. Ballon's book takes writers thru the process of creating well-rounded characters using various psychological techniques. She describes lots of ways to make quirky, real characters by allowing yourself to examine them as they interact the real world. This books has lots of exercises and does get into how to make villians (shadow characters) as well. It was a good read and I'll be using many techniques in my own stories to make my characters more real.

Kay Honeyman says

This book goes way beyond the normal character development strategies. The author is a psychotherapist who consults with authors. She has many valuable insights!

Erik says

Uggg, this is going to be hard to review.

I do not want to be overly hard on this, but I really cannot give this book anything above "it was ok" for a rating. It really proved to be of limited value for the purpose I was reading it (attempting to add depth to Non-Player Characters in a role play game), and seemed to lack many insights for writing overall. Ballon uses a repetitive style to kind of bludgeon her points home, but I did not see them as original or all that helpful.

The tactics are not complicated, and basically comes down to inserting "yourself" into the target faux persona and using your own emotions/feelings to give insights into how they would act. Like I would know what a sadistic child killer, bar maid trollop, or noble knight would feel or think. Ummm, ok.

It is possible others more focused on writing would find the book of some use, but it really was lacking in enough profound insights for me to rate this any higher than 2 Stars. Not bad, just not good either.

Josef says

Disorganized, humorless and vapid. Author writes in a near stream-of-consciousness, repeats herself, meanders around unrelated topics. She seems to have a hang-up about weight and keeps working it into analogies. 'Woman wants to lose weight, she easily loses a massive amount of weight by 'not eating candy', she finds love and is happy.' This is meant to be an example of good plotting that really delves into the character's psychology. Sub-101 information on both psychology and writing but any other 101 textbook would be more accessible and entertainingly written.

Melissa says

Great book to get into your character's head when writing.
