**Creating a Character Sketch**

To learn about creating a character that you can bring to life in a story, we’re going to learn about character sketches.

Writing a character sketch is like painting a picture so you can “see” the character in detail, and your reader can have a clear idea of him or her.

**Example of a character sketch:**

My grandfather was a small man with a big heart and an even bigger sense of humour. He was born in 1911 and wasn’t expected to live because his mother, my Great-Grandma Georgina, had been very ill while she was expecting him. But he not only lived, he also grew up to create airplanes and art. He wasn’t very tall –only 5 feet 3 inches, but he had a big personality, and he liked to play jokes on people. When I look at him in photographs, I think he looks a bit like Charlie Chaplin; he had the same dark curly hair and whimsical moustache as the famous comedian. He certainly always appeared to be plotting his next practical joke –usually at the expense of his older brother, my Great Uncle John. They were always playing tricks on each other. He met my grandmother when he was 24, and they were soon married. Not long after, World War Two broke out. At first, he was sent to an army training camp, but after two weeks he was sent back to his job of building airplanes. During the war, he built Wellington Bombers and Hurricanes at a secret airplane factory. It was also his job to fire a big anti-aircraft gun if there was an air raid by the Germans. I try to picture my petite grandfather in charge of one of those great big guns and I’m amazed that he could do that; he was a very determined man, with a great strength of character. After the war, he continued in the aviation industry by building passenger airplanes for what is now British Airways; he was promoted, and he was put in charge of the painting department. Of course, a man like my grandfather would need to have some fun with that! He would sometimes “surprise” my grandmother by pretending to bring home a new car; he would have his men spray paint it a different colour. He also had a huge talent as an artist. My mother still has an old photograph of what looks like a castle, but it’s really a painting of one on the great big wall of an aircraft hangar. My grandfather painted it for the Children’s Christmas party one year. He did very well in his career, which was even more surprising because he never attended college; he didn’t even finish school because his parents were poor and in those days, high school cost money. My grandfather was an amazing man.

**Writing a Character Sketch:**

Things to consider:

* The subject should be interesting and distinctive in some way, either in characteristics or actions.
* Readers should be told enough so that they feel that they have met the subject and almost know him or her.

Steps for writing a character sketch:

1. Choose a character to write about. Sometimes, basing a character on someone you already know really well is a good way of getting started. Make sure your character will be interesting to your readers.

2. List the character’s accomplishments, personality and physical traits. Remember: we already did this when we read *The Railway Children*. Look back at that unit if it helps.

3. Even if you use a real person to create you character, you can add or subtract details as needed. Make sure that what you choose will fit the story and interest your readers.

4. Remember your audience –who are your readers? Will they be adults or children or...? Make sure that what you write fits the readers you’re writing for.

5. Write your rough draft. Don’t worry too much about grammar and spelling at this point. It’s more important to get your ideas on the page while you still have them in your head.

6. Read your first draft. Then change anything you want to change, like spelling errors, for example. Then leave it for a few days.

7. Read your first draft again, putting yourself in the role of a reader. Does it read easily? Is it interesting?

8. Make any corrections and changes that you think are needed:

* Check for errors of punctuation, spelling, sentence construction, and grammar.
* Have you given enough details so that a reader can picture your subject clearly?
* Are the main parts of the sketch put together logically?
* Do you think readers will see, feel, and understand what you have written about your subject? If not, add or remove details so that they will.

9. Rewrite your final draft in light of your trial reader’s critique.

**Practice:**

Write a character sketch of your main character or someone you know that you could use to create a main character for your story.