

What is a Character Arc and Why is it necessary?

A Character Arc is the journey that a character takes through his or her life in the play. It encompasses backstory, yes, but it's biggest focus is what happens to the character during the course of their two hours on stage, and maybe secondarily, what their future might hold after the play ends.

I believe each character has an arc. Others would disagree. Some arcs are huge, covering a lot of ups and downs, plenty of emotional shifts, wide changes in behavior and/or thought. Others may have very little movement; but no character is entirely static. If you have a completely static character, why have them in the play at all? Their interruptions, distractions – conflicts with others – might best be handed by another character.

Each character has a beginning point in your story. They start somewhere, physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually -- there is a place for germination or fertilization. The conflicts that character either endures, fails to endure, ignores, or succeeds in defeating, make up the character arc.

Character arcs interact. If each character does not connect in some way to your principal character, then they might be superfluous. One character may not interact with every other character in the play. That is all right, since, it is the principal character's arc that becomes centric, all others flow to it, through it, or away from it. There is a causality. Each arc affects other arcs, but all arcs should have a cause and effect on the principal character's arc. If they don't, why are they in the play? Well, there might be a secondary character who's arc is affected and in turn affects the principal character. That gives levels of arc.

Not every play will need all of this arc-interaction. But I feel most do.

Some characters may not seem, or even look, as if they do anything! But examine them closely. If you say that a character does not change, that may, in itself, be an arc, because their NOT changing causes reactions in others. They are not static. They may not, in themselves, grow; but they cause either growth or stagnation in other characters. So they have an arc as measured against the over-all through line.

Character Arcs are based in the character's wants, needs, desires, likes, and dislikes. They center around what a character does to achieve those aims. All theatre/drama/comedy is centered on action; the physical/mental/emotional/psychological/spiritual *raison d'être* for each character, but especially your "principal protagonist" and his or her "principal antagonist"; how wants are undertaken, and how obstacles delay or even halt forward progress.

These different tactics give variety to a character, and fully-drawn characters give interest and purpose to the play. Call it a well-made-play, or not. Most involving drama benefits from solid arcs for each character. Remember this: once you know ALL the rules, then you will know which ones to break for your play. (If you feel you need to break them at all!)

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