

The Art of Creating a Character Using a Press Conference  
By Anne Ceronsky  
anne.ceronsky@annunciationmsp.org

Grade: All ages

Approximate length of time: 45 minutes (can be expanded)

Objectives: Students will create a character using their peers as sounding boards. Students will write a story about their character using details that go beyond physical descriptions.

Materials: (optional-have fun!)

- \*microphone
- \*clipboard
- \*podium
- \*press badges

Procedure: Students are asked to share bits and pieces about a memorable fictional character they have read about. The teacher or a student volunteer writes bits of information from each student on the board. After sharing for a few minutes, the students are asked to reflect upon what is on the board and then to share observations.

Most likely, the majority of the information students shared was about the character's personality, struggles, or story. Help the students notice what is not on the board: physical descriptors. Next, is where I go into a personal story about a friend from college who is a writer. I explain how Mary lives with a character in her head for weeks, months, or even years before anything is put down on paper. She does not necessarily know what the characters look like, but she could tell you what they would order at a certain restaurant, how they would respond to finding out their father was ill, or where they would choose to go on vacation. The point I try to make is that the characters become real to her. Our characters need to do the same before we can write about them. Knowing someone has blond hair and green eyes does not make them come as alive as knowing they always order a pickle with their soup or that growing up, they were deathly afraid of clowns.

The next part of this lesson I borrowed from Barry Lane's book, After the End.

Students are asked to write down ten characteristics about a character that they are going to create. Next, they must give this character a problem to be solved. (We talk about the books we have read so far and what problems our characters had faced.) Once the students are finished, they get into groups of four for a press conference.

Here is the format:

Students take turns pretending to be their character's agent. They tell "the press" everything they know about this character including his or her problem. It is then the responsibility of the press to ask questions **that will further develop the character**. (I would have one student go in front of the entire class first so you can help the students see examples of helpful questions.) I stress that their job as a press core is to help the author's character come alive. The roll of the agent presenting is to write down the questions using shorthand. It is not a time to answer the questions or to write ideas. That comes next.

When all students have had a chance to share, everyone returns to their desks and adds the details they feel will be beneficial in creating a character who comes alive and will be remembered. Students then move on to writing a story centered on their character and his or her problem.

Other connections: This lesson is extremely versatile and can be used as part of a unit on character writing, fiction writing, adding details, or in isolation. Students love it and I found this lesson to produce some of their best writing of the year.

Resources: [After The End](#) By: Barry Lane Heinemann Press, 1993.

Contact for additional information:

Anne Ceronsky, e-mail [anne.ceronsky@annunciationmsp.org](mailto:anne.ceronsky@annunciationmsp.org)