



When my developmental editing clients seem to be struggling to get beneath the surface with their characters, especially their main character, I often suggest they do a character interview. I'm sure you've encountered character interviews. They're great. The questions are good for getting to know the details that make up your character's life. What's your favorite color? What's your favorite kind of ice cream?

These questions are intended to supplement those details questions. They're designed to get at the heart of what makes your character a unique person. They're questions that go deeper, that perhaps make your character squirm a little.

What worries you most? When I was in fifth grade, our teacher asked us that question. I didn't want to tell the truth and say "dying," so I copied one of my friends who had a safe answer. One of the boys said, "Why worry? Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and all you do is get wet." The whole class laughed, but I still remember that and wonder what really did worry him, because I'm sure something did. Don't let your character fudge their answer, or hide behind humor.

What scares you the most, besides spiders and snakes? That's a little different than worries, although they're related.

Questions like these – and the answers they provoke – can have stakes built from them. What would happen if one of these scary, worrisome things looked like it might happen? What if it *did* happen? How might your character respond? Of course, most of this won't make it into your manuscript, but it will help you deepen what does go into your manuscript.

Here are a few more questions that help you get inside your character, your character's thoughts, and how your character might react when the stakes are high. To the best of your ability, answer these questions in your character's voice, from your character's perspective. You might be surprised at what you learn!

- **When you get up in the morning and have to go to school, how do you feel deep down inside?** Happy? Scared? Just want to sleep in? Something else? **Why** do you feel that way?

- **What is the best thing that could happen to you?** Sky's the limit. **Why** is it the best?
- **What is the worst thing that could happen to you? Why?**
- **If that "worst thing" happened, how do you think you'd react?**
- **Is there something in your life that you've never told anybody?**
- **What might happen if you told?**
- **Where do you feel happiest, most like yourself? What are you doing? Why does it make you so happy?**
- **Where do you feel saddest? What are you doing? Why does it make you so sad?**
- **Where do you feel most scared? (That's a bit different than what scares you the most.) What are you doing? Why does it make you so scared?**
- **Where do you feel safest? What are you doing? Why is it such a safe place?**
- **If something wonderful happened, who is the first person you'd tell? Why?**
- **If something terrible happened, who is the first person you'd tell? Why?**
- **Who is your least favorite person in the whole world? Why? If it's someone you know, do they know that? Why or why not?**
- **Who is your favorite person in the whole world? Why? If it's someone you know, do they know that? Why or why not?**