

Developing Characters - Character Expansion Exercise

Choose a character description from the list below. Using the Feelings Wheel, select an emotion from the outer ring and apply it to the character you have chosen.

Expand on the description by imagining the situation that caused the character to feel that way. What happened before this moment? How does the emotion affect the character's behavior, speech, observations, posture, or environment? What details reveal the emotional state indirectly?

1. A retired carnival electrician sits alone at a twenty-four-hour diner outside Amarillo wearing a pressed western shirt with pearl snaps, grease-stained jeans, and a turquoise belt buckle shaped like a rattlesnake. He spent thirty years repairing Ferris wheels and neon signs while traveling fairgrounds across the Southwest. A half-packed toolbox rests beside his booth while eighteen-wheelers hiss past the windows in the rain.
2. A woman wearing faded camouflage overalls and bright yellow rubber gloves sorts through crates of oranges behind a roadside fruit stand in central Florida. Her family has worked citrus groves for three generations, though most of the nearby land has recently been sold to developers. A radio hanging from a nail plays old Tejano songs while mosquitoes gather beneath the floodlights.
3. A former coal miner in a threadbare church suit and muddy work boots stands outside a shuttered union hall in southern West Virginia. He now drives a school bus through mountain roads that once carried mining trucks all night long. Someone has chained plywood over the building's front doors, but the old union emblem is still visible beneath the peeling paint.
4. A young violin repair apprentice wearing fingerless gloves, a wool coat, and mismatched socks works beneath a flickering desk lamp in a cramped apartment above a bakery in Montreal. Her grandfather repaired instruments for touring folk musicians throughout Quebec before arthritis forced him to stop. The room smells faintly of spruce shavings, coffee, and old sheet music.
5. A commercial shrimp boat captain wearing mirrored sunglasses, rubber deck boots, and a Saints sweatshirt unloads tangled nets at a harbor in coastal Louisiana before sunrise. Hurricanes have scattered his family across three states over the last decade, though he still works the same waters his father taught him to navigate as a child. Rusted crab traps clatter against the dock while gulls circle overhead.
6. A former rodeo clown wearing a denim jacket covered in stitched patches and smoke-browned cowboy boots tunes a broken upright piano inside a small-town VFW hall in eastern Wyoming. After years traveling rodeos, he settled near the Nebraska border and now repairs instruments for bars, churches, and schools. Empty folding chairs line the walls beside faded photographs of local veterans.

7. A subway maintenance worker wearing reflective coveralls and a knit cap eats hard-boiled eggs from a paper towel while waiting for the midnight train beneath Queens. He immigrated from Georgia — the country, not the state — and sends money home every month to help his sisters renovate their mother's apartment. Fluorescent lights buzz above damp concrete walls layered with decades of graffiti.
8. A widow wearing a lavender housecoat and spotless white sneakers waters tomato plants behind a weather-beaten trailer outside Roswell, New Mexico. She once cataloged meteorological data for the Air Force base nearby and still keeps handwritten weather journals stacked neatly in cardboard boxes. Wind rattles loose aluminum siding while dust gathers against the chain-link fence.
9. A tattooed sheep shearer wearing suspenders, thermal underwear, and a battered Red Wings cap sharpens his blades beside a livestock barn in rural Tasmania. He spent years drifting between shearing crews across Australia before buying an old motorcycle repair shop with his brother. The barn smells of lanolin, wet wool, and diesel fuel.
10. A teenage cemetery groundskeeper wearing a black hoodie beneath an oversized rain poncho sweeps wet leaves from crooked gravestones in coastal Maine. His father captains a lobster boat and his mother restores antique clocks in a workshop behind their house. Fog rolls inland from the harbor while gulls settle on the church steeple across the road.