

HOW TO FIND YOUR CHARACTER'S MISBELIEF

STEP 1: WHAT'S YOUR MAIN THEME?

in as few words as possible, describe your story's main "truth", character lesson, or "big idea"

*if you draw a blank, try answering these questions:
What change would you like to see in the world?*

What is the truth that you want to scream from the rooftops?

STEP 2: FLIP THIS TRUTH UPSIDE-DOWN AND MAKE IT A LIE

what is the exact opposite of your story's truth? this is the clearest definition of your character's misbelief!

STEP 3: ASK YOURSELF: "WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED IN MY CHARACTER'S PAST TO MAKE THEM BELIEVE SUCH A THING?"

remember: it doesn't have to be a big pivotal moment – it could be a subtle but constant affirmation (the drip on the rock)

STEP 4: WRITE THAT BACKSTORY SCENE FOR YOUR CHARACTER

actually writing this backstory scene will give you insight into the depths of your character's inner conflict! pause, go to your scrivener or a word doc, and write this scene.

STEP 5: DESCRIBE (OR WRITE) OTHER SCENES IN THE CHARACTER'S PAST THAT CEMENTED THIS MISBELIEF AS TRUTH TO THEM

brainstorm a few other moments throughout your character's past where something challenged their hard-won misbelief and they chose their lie in response

SCENE 1:

SCENE 2:

SCENE 3:

STEP 6: ASK YOURSELF: "HOW IS MY CHARACTER DISSATISFIED WITH THEIR LIFE TODAY, BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THIS LIE SO FIRMLY?"

their misbelief is the root of their dissatisfaction – but they don't know that. all they know is they are dissatisfied.

STEP 7: ASK YOURSELF: "WHAT DOES MY CHARACTER THINK WILL MAKE THEM HAPPY, BASED ON THEIR MISBELIEF?"

at the end of the day, all your character wants is to be happy. but their definition of "happiness" is contorted by their misbelief

STEP 8: ASK YOURSELF: "WHAT STEPS COULD MY CHARACTER TAKE NOW TO ACTIVELY PURSUE THIS GOAL?"

this will lead into your plot (the external conflict) and become your character's mission throughout the story

STEP 9: CLARIFY THE MOTIVE, THE GOAL, AND THE PLOT

go back through your answers to all these questions and pull out 1) the lie they started believing at a young age, 2) what they think will bring them true happiness, and 3) the steps they're going to take to make this dream a reality.

THE MOTIVE:

THE GOAL:

THE PLOT:

STEP 10: LET THIS DRIVE THE STORY FORWARD

If you start with your character's misbelief, that gives them a motive, which gives them a goal, which drives the PLOT.

THE MISBELIEF > DRIVES THE MOTIVE > DRIVES THE GOAL > DRIVES THE PLOT

Most writers don't do this. They come up with a *plot* and sometimes a *goal* for the character, but so often they forget to create a motive behind the goal... and a misbelief behind the motive. That's why so many stories fall flat and you forget them in a week.

If you want your story to be memorable, it all starts with your character's misbelief.

Side note about side characters:

You can repeat this whole process with your side characters, but don't fret too much about writing their backstory scenes and making them have super complex inner conflict. They are SIDE characters for a reason — they don't get as much "screen time" as your main character(s).

However, they're in a unique position to incorporate multiple themes and truths into your story. Do create character arcs for sides, but save your most important theme for your main character.