BUILDING CHARACTER-DRIVEN NARRATIVES

Characters drive the story. They create the conflicts. The only emotion in a game experience without good characters is the emotion derived by the player from the gameplay: frustration, anger, exhilaration, triumph … the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat…. To create emotion through story, we must start with character.

- Lee Sheldon

INCOMES

- Imagination
- Creativity
- Suspension of disbelief

OUTCOMES

- Gain insight into characters
- Build a character profile
- Reveal through action

ACTIVITY ONE
CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER

1. Review the list of employees on the next page.
2. With the group at your table, select an employee to work with. Add more details if needed. Use the whiteboard to collaborate.
3. Keep your employee in mind when you return to the larger group.

Even a great story is not enough. It must be inhabited and driven by great characters.

- Lee Sheldon

Notes

Jennifer

Jennifer has an outgoing personality and is motivated by her desire to relax and have fun. She loves to make her co-workers laugh. However, Jennifer is afraid that she may do or say something that may cost her this job. She is 33 years old, single with no children.

Kwame

Kwame has a reserved personality and is motivated by his desire to show respect and be respected. He fears making people in authority angry. He is 48 years old, married with no children.

Ling

Ling is shy and rarely speaks unless prompted. She is concerned that she is not making enough money for retirement so she wants a promotion soon. However, Ling is afraid that time will never come. She is 57 years old, divorced with no children.

Jorge

Jorge is cheerful and optimistic. His goal is to advance his career. Consequently, he's afraid that any mistakes he makes will be written into his performance review and destroy his chances of being promoted. He is 35 years old, married with one toddler.

Amy

Amy is cynical and often makes alienating comments. She craves attention and aggressively inserts herself into situations and conversations to learn all she can in an effort to keep her job as long as possible. She is 60 years old, divorced with one adult son.

Steve

Steve is loud, aggressive, and wants to be noticed. He has been promoted several times throughout his career and has grown to expect it. He has an air of entitlement that can be off-putting. He frequently brings up his history of excellent performance reviews and fears getting a bad one. He is 47 years old, divorced with five teen children.

Abigail

Abigail is quick-tempered but is still outgoing and friendly. She wants to advance in the company but worries about how her current work relationships will be influenced. She's part of a tight-knit group and doesn't want to leave anyone behind. She is 59 years old, divorced with three adult kids.

Andre

Andre is typically reserved but makes significant contributions while in his comfort zone. He is concerned that he is not making enough money to support his family, so he seeks out promotions constantly. He worries about his reputation and whether he is being perceived the "right" way. He is 34 years old, married with two toddlers.

Fran

Fran is has a melancholy personality and rarely laughs or smiles. However, she believes her seriousness is an advantage on the job and hopes it will take her places. She's not great at work relationships but protects and cherishes the few that she has. She is 36 years old, divorced with four young children.
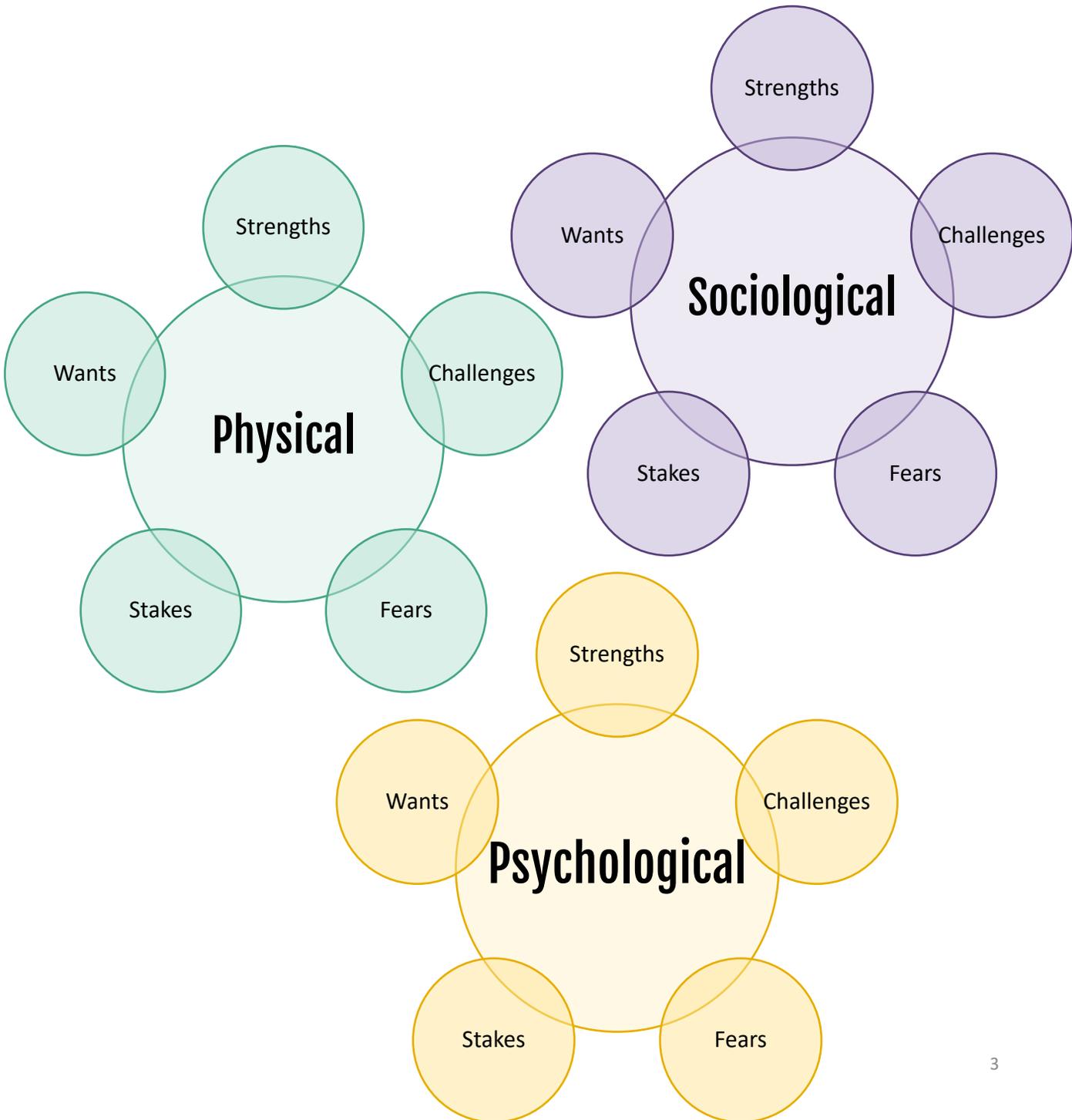
CHARACTER DIMENSIONS

PHYSICAL
How the character physically looks and behaves

SOCIOLOGICAL
The character's past, present lifestyle, culture, and living environment

PSYCHOLOGICAL
Actions, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and worldview

Physical
- Strengths
- Challenges
- Fears
- Stakes
- Wants

Sociological
- Strengths
- Challenges
- Fears
- Stakes
- Wants

Psychological
- Strengths
- Challenges
- Fears
- Stakes
- Wants

CHARACTER DIMENSIONS TEMPLATE

Name	Samuel King
Age	47
Purpose	Samuel is a regional retail manager resisting a new POS and back-office system being installed at his stores.

	Psychological	**Social**	**Physical**
Strengths	He is smart, knows the business well, and excels at his job	He gets along with most people and knows how to exit a situation when he gets angry.	He is physically fit, tall, and strong; is deeply invested in his health.
Challenges	He is insecure about not having a college degree like many of his counterparts.	He has a quick temper and can be short with people when he is tired.	He often resorts to using his sizeable stature to intimidate people.
Fears	He fears that newer technology will pass him by and leave him without a job.	He fears that he's not friends with the "right" people, something that could damage his career.	He fears that's he's getting too old to do the job well because he gets tired faster.
Stakes	His identity as the person who knows the most will be at risk if a new system gets installed.	He thinks his team will lose respect for him if he resists change or expresses his fears.	He connects his physical abilities and his mental acuity – when he thinks people see him as incompetent, he overcompensates by working out more.
Wants	He wants everything to stay as they are, but he also wants his stores to be competitive.	He wants his manager to see him as the go-to person still and trusted advisor.	He wants to say competitive in all aspects of his life – physical and mental.

Backstory
Samuel was one of the company's first employees. He has a good reputation and has been able to shine regardless of the challenges before him. But the changes are coming too fast lately, and he's now struggling to keep up. He now finds himself being pessimistic about new initiatives and being very vocal about his displeasure. His attitude influences his team and his peers who look up to him.

COMPLETE A CHARACTER TEMPLATE

1. With the group at your table, select a person to complete the template on the next page.

2. Complete the character template based what you know (and assume) about your employee.

3. Save your work – you'll need it for the next stage.

Notes

CHARACTER DIMENSIONS TEMPLATE

Name	
Age	
Purpose	

	Psychological	Social	Physical
Strengths			
Challenges			
Fears			
Stakes			
Wants			
Backstory			

But with interactive storytelling, there's a transcendent principle: **do, don't show.** Build the relationships into the actions the player takes and the direct relationships that the player experiences through the game, not in the backstory.

<div align="right">- Lee Sheldon</div>

REVEAL YOUR CHARACTER THROUGH ACTION

1. Read the scenario below.
2. With the group at your table, answer the questions on the next page based on what you know about your character.
3. Save your work.
4. Prepare to share your insights with the class.

REVEAL A CHARACTER THROUGH ACTION

SCENARIO: SELLING YOURSELF

Your character's **direct manager is leaving** for a job at another company. The role reports to the **division director** who is deciding whether to fill the vacant role by internal promotion or by an external new hire. The role requires industry experience, but, while this manager must lead seven direct reports, previous management experience is a preference instead of a requirement.

The division director hears that your character is interested in the job and has decided to call a meeting. Your character's goal is to have an exchange with the director that will favor him or her for the job.

Who the character is may either help or hinder their interaction.

Story structure can spring from many sources: a situation, a relationship, an ideal, a need to educate, whatever. But it is borne on the backs of the characters that inhabit it.

<div align="right">- Lee Sheldon</div>

REVEAL YOUR CHARACTER THROUGH ACTION

What will your character **do** to prepare for the meeting?

Your character is worried about the meeting. What **action** could reveal what your character is worried about?

Near the end of the meeting your character doesn't think it went well. What will they **do** to try to salvage it?

Your character thinks they've turned things around. What will they **do** to show they feel this way?

Bonus question: Does your character get the promotion? Why or why not?