If you followed the Character Evolution Files’ Journey Through the Character Arc series, you might recall that each post ended with a set of questions designed to help writers construct each arc stage with appropriate literary elements and devices. Now, you can have those interviews in one convenient document!

The Journey Through the Character Arc Master Questionnaire contains all 10 “interviews” that, when combined, result in a complete and in-depth character arc outline to accompany a traditional plot outline. In other words, it’s a “one-stop shop” for plotting a positive arc from beginning (Trigger / Inciting Incident) to end (Emergence / Resolution) and for gathering all of your notes about a protagonist’s journey of change and growth.

Haven’t read the Journey Through the Character Arc series yet? No worries! Each interview’s heading is linked to its respective blog post. Just click the link so you can read more about the arc stage.

Instructions:

Print out a copy of this worksheet, and (if possible) have a print or electronic version of any outlines or plotting / planning documents you’re using for your next story.

Feel free to use a blank page or Word document to complete this activity.
Stage 1: The Trigger (Inciting Incident)

1. During which chapter and page does the Trigger occur? Where is it located in terms of the story’s overall page and word count?

2. Have you introduced your protagonist yet?

3. Have you volunteered details about the protagonist such as age, occupation / role in society, and important physical descriptors? If so, list those details below.

4. Have you revealed some of the protagonist’s qualities, strengths, or talents? How about flaws or weaknesses? If so, what are they?
5. How does the Trigger tie in with the external plot?

6. How does the protagonist react to the Trigger?

7. Does the Trigger bring the protagonist face to face with her false belief?

8. Does the Trigger hint at the protagonist’s story goal?
9. What reason(s) have you given so far for readers to care about the protagonist? Why should they care about her reaction to the Trigger?
Stage 2: **The Comfort Zone (Act I)**

1. How long does the Comfort Zone last in terms of the story’s overall page and word count?

2. What is the protagonist’s current world like? What does it consist of (“home,” possessions, governing laws / rules / expectations, beliefs / morals / values, etc.)? Why does the protagonist feel comfortable here? What would force her to leave this place against her will?

3. Who are currently the important people in the protagonist’s life? What role(s) will they play during the story? Will the protagonist meet new characters who will also be significant to the plot and/or her character arc?
4. What is the protagonist's current situation? What does she consider her normal routine? What relationships or outside forces put stress on her or affect her in some way? How will these play into the story?

5. Who or what is the story's antagonist(s)? Is it a character, an organization, the environment, or the protagonist herself? How will it / they try to prevent the protagonist from reaching her eventual story goal?

6. What else will readers learn about the protagonist during this stage? What other positive (qualities, strengths, talents) and negative (flaws, weaknesses) are revealed?
7. Does the Comfort Zone establish the protagonist's false belief? How?

8. How does the Comfort Zone show the protagonist's continued reaction to and rejection of the Trigger? What examples of dialogue, action, and other storytelling elements prove this?

9. What qualities or traits demonstrate the protagonist's potential to let go of her false belief? How do they manifest during this stage?
10. Does the Comfort Zone continue to hint at the upcoming story goal?

11. What reason(s) have you given readers to continue bonding with and caring about the protagonist? Why should they care about her Comfort Zone struggles?
Stage 3: The Point of No Return (End of Act I)

1. Where does the Point of No Return occur in terms of the story’s overall page count / word count?

2. What event brings the protagonist to the choice she will need to make?

3. What choice is the protagonist forced to make? What are her options, and the consequences of each?

4. What is the protagonist’s story goal as a result of this choice? How does it conflict with her false belief?
5. Who will help the protagonist as she works to achieve her story goal? What antagonistic force(s) stands in her way?

6. When and where does the protagonist need to reach her story goal?

7. How will the protagonist reach her story goal? What steps will she need to take? What challenges will she face along the way?
8. Why does the story goal matter to the protagonist? What's at stake if she fails to achieve it or take action?

9. What is the protagonist's immediate reaction (physical and emotional) to her decision?

10. What reason(s) have you given readers to continue caring about the protagonist?
Stage 4: The Struggle (Act II, First Half)

1. Where does the Struggle begin in terms of the story’s overall page count / word count? How long does it last?

2. What steps does the protagonist need to take toward her story goal during this stage?

3. What is the protagonist’s lingering mindset after the Point of No Return? How does this influence her early behaviors during the Struggle?
4. How does the protagonist's false belief affect her progress toward her story goal? Which flaws or weaknesses flare up during this stage? What kinds of mistakes does she make?

5. How does the antagonistic force(s) reassert itself? What clues does this reminder(s) offer about the external conflict that's driving the protagonist's story goal?

6. Who or what will help the protagonist during her vulnerable state? What kind of assistance does she receive?
7. How do any of the supporting characters act as mirror characters for the protagonist? What common false beliefs or inner conflicts do they share but have dealt with in different ways, either positive or negative?

8. How does the protagonist react to each event during the Struggle? Why? What are the consequences of her actions and reactions?
Stage 5: The Revelation (Midpoint)

1. Where does the Revelation occur in terms of the story’s overall page count / word count?

2. What event immediately preceding the Revelation shakes up the protagonist’s world and prompts her reflection? How is this accomplished?

3. How does the protagonist reflect on her previous mistakes and at this time? Does she connect those errors to her false belief? What other conclusions does she draw?
4. What is the opposite truth to the protagonist's false belief? How does the Revelation help the protagonist realize this truth, and provide a glimpse of how life might be different if she sheds the lie she believes?

5. How does the Revelation reinforce the story goal? Does the protagonist realize her false belief will hinder her progress toward her story goal, and how the truth will help her instead?

6. What is the new choice that the protagonist must make? What does she decide?
The Journey Through the Character Arc Master Questionnaire

7. What is the first action that the protagonist takes after making this decision? How does this reflect her acknowledgment of the truth?

8. What evidence (e.g., emotions, thoughts) proves to readers that the protagonist still clings to her false belief?
Stage 6: The Charge (Act II, Second Half)

1. Where does the Charge begin in terms of the story’s overall page count / word count? How long does it last?

2. What further steps does the protagonist take toward her story goal? How does she switch from a state of reaction to a state of initiative?

3. How does the protagonist’s acknowledgment of her false belief’s opposite truth impact her story goal progress? What new behaviors (character strengths, correct decisions, etc.) allow her to demonstrate her understanding of this truth?
4. Who or what continues to help the protagonist at this time? Does she receive any new assistance that she didn’t have in previous stages?

5. Do any mirror characters from past arc stages return for the Charge? How do they continue to contrast (either positively or negatively) the protagonist’s struggles with her false belief, truth, or inner conflict?

6. How does the protagonist’s false belief continue to affect her story goal pursuit? Which flaws or weaknesses flare up again? What mistakes does the protagonist make? How does her internal dialogue reflect this?
7. How does the antagonistic force(s) reassert itself? What clues does this reminder(s) provide about the upcoming Moment of Truth?

8. For every Charge event, what is the protagonist’s reason(s) for her actions and decisions? What emotions does she experience that demonstrate her investment in the story goal as well as her internal war between her false belief and its opposite truth?
Stage 7: The Dark Night of the Soul (End of Act II)

1. Where does the Dark Night of the Soul occur in terms of the story’s overall page count / word count?

2. What event immediately preceding the Dark Night of the Soul shakes up the protagonist’s world? How did the protagonist’s previous refusal(s) to let go of her false belief enable this event to occur?

3. How does the prompting event endanger the protagonist’s chances of reaching her story goal?
4. As a result of the prompting event, what does the protagonist see as the true cost of her false belief? What are the ramifications (both immediate and long-term) if she fails to change?

5. What internal friction does the protagonist experience between her false belief and the truth? Do any of her flaws or weaknesses flare up again? How does she realize the truth will help her reach her story goal and her false belief will fail?

6. What is the ultimate choice that the protagonist must make between her false belief and the truth? What does she decide?
7. How does the Dark Night represent the death of the protagonist's old self? What immediate action does she take that symbolizes this death? Do other types of “death” emerge?

8. How does the Dark Night foreshadow the Moment of Truth? What additional information does the protagonist receive about the antagonistic force(s)?

9. What is the protagonist’s emotional state at the end of this stage? How does it reveal her willingness to reject her lie and embrace the truth?
Stage 8: The Aftermath (Act III, First Half)

1. Where does the Aftermath begin in terms of the story’s overall page count / word count? How long does it last?

2. How does the protagonist’s reaction to the Dark Night of the Soul linger into the Aftermath? What thoughts and feelings does she experience as this stage begins?

3. What are the immediate consequences (results, fallout, etc.) of the protagonist’s decision to accept the truth? How have things become more difficult for the time being and temporarily hindered her progress toward her story goal?
4. How does the protagonist question her acceptance of the truth? What dialogue, thoughts, or actions demonstrate these doubts?

5. Despite her doubts, how does her protagonist find the emotional strength to continue working toward her story goal? How does this manifest through her dialogue, thoughts, or actions?

6. What other small, positive changes does the protagonist exhibit during this stage? How is she behaving differently than she was at the beginning of the story?
7. What reminders of assistance does the protagonist receive at this time? Which supporting characters reaffirm their commitment to help her? Does she realize the importance of any knowledge, skills, or objects she acquired earlier in the story?

8. What event shortly before the Aftermath’s end threatens the protagonist’s story-goal pursuit? How does it reflect the false belief she shed during the Dark Night? How does she reject its temptation and form a “plan of attack” in response?

9. What is the protagonist’s plan for confronting the antagonistic force(s) and reaching her story goal? How does it draw on what the protagonist has learned from her previous arc stages, including the truth she now believes?
10. How does the protagonist feel at the end of the Aftermath? What is her mentality as she prepares for the Climax / Moment of Truth?
Stage 9: **The Moment of Truth (Climax)**

1. Where does the Moment of Truth begin in terms of the story’s overall page count / word count? How long does it last?

2. Briefly describe the protagonist's Plan A, as well as any facts of the final confrontation between her and the antagonistic force(s). Who is involved? Where and when does it take place? What assistance (supporting characters, objects, skills, etc.) from previous stages is available to her at this time?

3. How does the antagonistic force(s) assault the protagonist's belief in the truth? How does the protagonist overcome each attack?
4. How does the protagonist's Plan A fail?

5. What split-second thoughts of defeat does the protagonist experience immediately following this? How does it force her to briefly envision what might happen if she loses?

6. How does this glimpse of defeat motivate the protagonist to continue? Does she still see a clear route to her original story goal? Or, does she realize that goal is now impossible and change her focus to an alternate goal?
7. What action(s) does the protagonist take next to demonstrate her commitment to her new truth? Does she still use any assistance from her previous arc stages?

8. What happens as an immediate result of the protagonist's truth in action? Does she achieve a Happy Ending (fulfillment of original story goal, with most desirable results) or a Change of Heart (fulfillment of alternate goal, with possibly less than desirable results)?

9. How does the protagonist feel when the Moment of Truth ends? What other significant thoughts does she share with the reader?
Stage 10: The Emergence (Resolution)

1. Where does the Emergence begin in terms of the story’s overall page count / word count? How long does it last?

2. What remaining plot threads are tied up or completed during this stage? How are they resolved?

3. How does the protagonist demonstrate she has changed for the better and is fully committed to her new truth? What actions, thoughts, and dialogue illustrate this?
4. How do the protagonist's actions here contrast those from her Trigger?

5. How do the protagonist's new truth and other changed beliefs contrast those from her Comfort Zone? In other words, what is her new emotional and/or psychological “comfort zone”?

6. Does the protagonist share her new view(s) on her old false belief via dialogue or internal thoughts / observations during this time?
7. Does the protagonist also return to her physical "comfort zone" (home, location of Act I, etc.)? How has her opinion of it changed? If she doesn’t return to it, why?

8. What aspects (positive and negative) of the protagonist’s old self haven’t changed?

9. What parting image would you like the protagonist to leave for readers? How would you like her to be remembered after this story? How can you illustrate this through a scene(s), behavior, or dialogue?
10. How does the protagonist feel when the story ends? What other thoughts of importance does she have at this time?