Tracking Character Development

Assuming the characters you are reading about are actually developing (see the types of characters sheet), knowing how they change is an important part of reading a story. Analyzing this is an important part of reading because most really good stories center around really interesting characters. The plot is only important if you care about the characters. Well-written characters are the backbone to any story, and a good story has characters that change as the story goes. Here’s how to track that:

1. **Keep track of what motivates a character**—A character has to want something. They have to be motivated to do what they do. Usually this is pretty clear to the reader. Either it’s spelled out obviously or it’s more subtle, but it’s always there. Figuring out WHY the character does certain things is a great way to track him/her. Ask yourself, does what motivates them change ever? Do they get what they want? How does this affect them?

2. **Keep track of character decisions**—Analyzing what the character does, which often goes right along with why the character does it (motivation), gives new insights into the characters we read. Jotting down the decisions of a character will help you to see what type of character he/she may be, and may help you predict what the character might do in the future. This makes you more of an active participant of the story, instead of someone watching from the outside.

3. **Keep track of the character’s interactions with others**—Knowing how other characters react to a character can often tell you more about the character than anything else. When a character is narrating their own story, they may not be giving you all the facts. In these cases, seeing what others say and do around that character can become essential. This will give you new insights to the story and what may really be going on.

4. **Keep track of any physical/emotional/thought changes**—It’s no secret that people change. They grow, they make mistakes, they get mad. Keeping track of these changes within a character will help you to get to know the character on a more personal level and relate to that character a bit more. It may also help you see when a character is just not authentic. Seeing a character react in a strange way can throw you off as a reader and ruin the story.

Using these tricks, you can analyze any story for the development of its characters.