Friday, September 23, 10:45 am-12:15 pm

**Character Development and Arc: Key Points**

**David B. Coe**

Creating characters may be the most important thing we writers do. Stories can survive bad plotting, poor pacing, boring settings, and mediocre writing, as long as the characters engage the reader. But characters who are unbelievable, unsympathetic, uninteresting will kill a story.

**The ABCs of Character:**

— **Attributes:** Facts about the character. Sum of all they are, all the ways they might be characterized, sorted, defined.

— **Backstory:** Character’s history: what’s happened in her life, where does she come from? This is where the secrets are, the roots of some attributes, the seeds of conflict and story. This is where characters develop their strengths and weaknesses, which are crucial to plotting.

— **Circumstance:** The immediate situation the character is in. What has happened to change or exacerbate something in Attributes or to dredge up something from Backstory? This is where story begins. This is where our character discovers obstacles and develops motivation.

**Befriending Our Characters:**

— The skills and qualities that make us good friends, good spouses, good parents, good siblings, are also the skills and qualities that make us good writers. Our ability to put ourselves in the emotional shoes of others, to empathize and sympathize, to share joy and grief, anger and fear. These are essential to good relationships, and they are essential to good writing.

— Emotion is what makes writing work. It’s what makes narration effective. Without emotion, we are simply reciting plot points. The point of befriending our characters is to give our readers access to the emotions that animate them, that make them relatable, and that make all the things to which we subject them meaningful and compelling.

**Character Arc:**

— Character arc is the emotional and circumstantial journey our characters take from the beginning of the story to its end. Characters should grow and change over the course of a narrative, overcoming weaknesses, coming to grips with secrets, and learning to harness their strengths. Character arc is the payoff for all the work we did in developing the ABCs.