

Dating Your Character Chapter 1 Excerpt:

let's assume you noticed, tucked in the back of your cabinet, an old cup with some college logo on it. Something about it calls to you. Don't discard that detail as superficial—let it sit with you for a moment. As it ping-pongs in your mind, this process may lead you somewhere. You may find yourself overwhelmed with ideas, images flying at you. But, through simple questions, you can begin to dig deeper to uncover the details that could be keepers.

In this example, you might toy with the notion that your character went to this college. But then why would she keep this old cup hanging around at the back of her cabinet?

- Does she ever use it, or is it a forgotten part of her past?
- Did she buy it, or did someone give it to her?

Often a detail like this is what improv troupes call a “gift”—something you can react and build upon, often revealing emotional or biographical information about your character. As is often the case, the detail is waiting to symbolically express some truth, at the very least engaging you and possibly deepening your understanding. In the Kenneth Branagh/Emma Thompson film *Dead Again*, the rare anklet that he gives symbolizes the love they share and their eternal bond; it helps the audience believe in their reincarnation.

Having read thousands of scripts, we've noticed that most writers seem to settle for characters that are stereotypical and generalized. Those scripts that have resonated with us embodied choice detail. Incorporating evocative details makes your characters and your scripts come alive.