

Character Introductions: Part 10

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Think there's nothing to introducing characters in a script?
Think again!

Over the next few weeks, I'm doing a deep dive into the subject of character introductions. Why would I do that? For an explanation, check out [Part 1](#).

Part 2 [here](#).

Part 3 [here](#).

Part 4 [here](#).

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Part 10: Introduction Through Objects

If you recall the final script example from Part 9 — Marty McFly's introduction in *Back to the Future* — screenwriters

Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale take the reader on a visual tour of items (tennis shoes, skateboard, guitar, amp, speaker) *before* we actually see full-on and hear the character. The use of objects represents another option we as writers have to create entertaining and informative character introductions.

Why entertaining? Because we *tease* the reader, doling out clues about the character's personality as represented by the items about which we write.

Why informative? Because if we choose the objects well, they are a *reflection of the character's attitudes*, speaking to their core essence.

For example, why did Zemeckis and Gale choose the guitar, amp, speaker, guitar pick? Because Marty plays lead guitar in a rock-and-roll band and it's his fantasy to become a successful rock musician. These objects reflect that part of Marty's core essence.

Here's a key to handling a character introduction in this manner: Whatever objects you choose can not be arbitrary, but rather have to reveal something important about the character, say something meaningful about them.

There are all small examples of introduction through objects. In fact, there was one in Part 9: The beginning of *Romancing the Stone*. Here again is the opening that script:

A size 16-EEEE boot kicks through the door, ripping the old board from the wall. GROGAN's grisly body stands framed in the doorway, a dirty, foul-smelling beast. The shotgun in his grip is cocked. A strong-hearted beauty, ANGELINA, 34, in a buckskin poncho, eyes him guardedly from behind a table, and surreptitiously slides a boot dagger out of its sheath. In the rafters a spider faints.

"A size 16-EEEE boot." That object is the very first image writer Diane Thomas uses to start the story. Why? Because it's entertaining: (1) Begins the story with a bang; (2) It's a strong visual image; (3) It immediately gets a reader thinking, "Who is this boot connected to and why are they kicking in the door?"

The boot also conveys information: Size 16-EEEE is a **big** boot attached to a **big** foot connected to a **big** guy. And sure enough, the boot-wearer Grogan is an imposing figure: "a dirty, foul-smelling beast" per the script carrying a shotgun to boot [pun intended]. So even with this small example of object introduction, we can see those dual dynamics in play: entertaining and informative.

Examples in Movie Scripts of Introduction Through Objects

The script *E.T.* [written by Melissa Mathison] is an interesting example. A investigative official played by Peter Coyote is introduced over several pages using keys as an object.

In the Opening, where E.T. gets left behind by the mother ship, there are humans investigating the scene:

A man with keys jangling from his waist walks past a headlight. He carries a flashlight in his hand.

Later in the same scene:

"Keys" hears this sound and quickly turns around.

So at this point, the character is given a name reflecting the object. Then:

One of the pursuers is the man wearing the keys on his waist.

After E.T. has found Elliott, there is a scene where investigators search the neighborhood:

The man with keys on his waist walks into the area, as other men comb the ground with electronic equipment.

Then a later scene with the investigators back on the scene:

The shadow of a man falls on the driveway. The sound of keys jangling is heard.

Much later after Elliott takes off with E.T. to rendezvous with the mother ship:

"Keys" runs up to Mary and asks where she's going. Gertie blurts out "to the spaceship."

Here is a case where the object has such a close association with the character, his presence is signified by the object every time he shows up.



In the movie script *Heathers* [written by Daniel Waters], the writer introduces the story's Protagonist Veronica using a set of objects tied to the game of croquet:

Elegiac music murmurs as three female and barefoot PAIRS OF LEGS in skirts break from tableau to gently engage in Croquet. A blue mallet hits a blue ball through a wicket, a green mallet knocks a green ball, and a yellow mallet pushes forward a yellow ball, all in enticing syncopation.

Suddenly a red ball rockets through the dew covered grass and hits the green ball. The LEGS all stop moving as a FOURTH PAIR OF LEGS, this one in stylish shoes and stockings, marches to the red ball and steps on it. A red mallet is brought down hard on the red ball causing the adjacent green ball to thunder out of view. The Pair of Legs maneuvering the green ball departs. This process of elimination is grimly repeated with the yellow ball and yet again with the blue ball.

However, when the BLUE MALLETED PLAYER makes her sad exit, the viewer's viewpoint glides along with this particular Pair of Legs. A red ball whizzes by. The Legs stop. Another red ball malevolently sails past the Legs. Then yet another red ball. A fourth red ball makes brutal contact with the Legs causing the Player to fall to her knees and into the frame. The Player is VERONICA SAWYER.

There are numerous layers of meaning to the use of croquet as a means of introducing Veronica and the specific subculture of her 'friends' world: These mean girls play with others in their game of life determining who is cool and who is not, this game has a complex set of rules, and mostly

Veronica becomes the victim of their enmity, all indicted symbolically by starting the story with a croquet game.



An interesting example of an introduction through objects is the movie *High Fidelity* [screenplay by D.V. DeVincentis & Steve Pink & John Cusack and Scott Rosenberg, based on the novel by Nick Hornby]. Here is how the script begins:

FADE IN:

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

STEREO

Not a minisystem, not a matching set, but coveted audiophile clutter of McIntosh and Nakamichi, each component from a different era, bought piece by piece in various nanoseconds of being flush.

ROB (V.O.)

What came first? The music or the misery? People worry about kids playing with guns and watching violent videos, we're scared that some sort of culture of violence is taking them over...

RECORDS

Big thin LPs. Fields of them. We move across them, slowly... they seem to come to rest in an end of a few books... but then the CD's start, and go on, faster and faster, forever then the singles, then the tapes...

ROB (V.O.)(CONT'D)

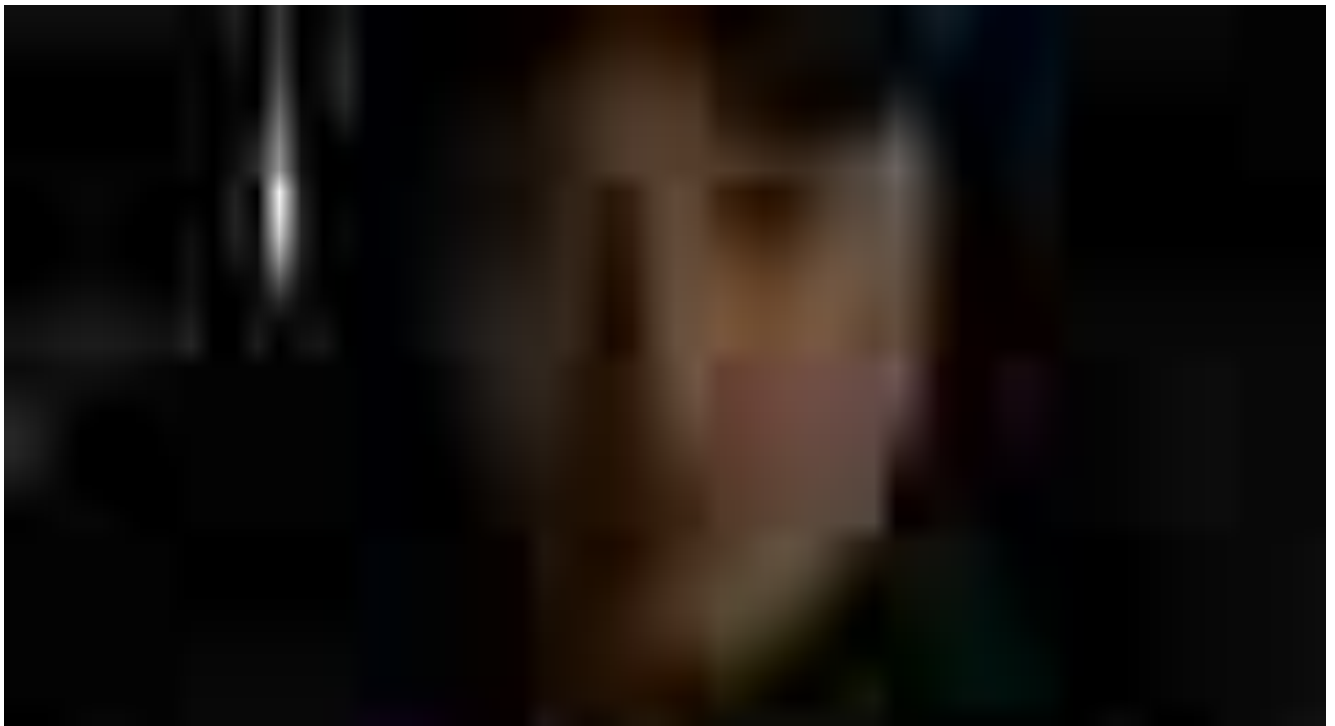
But nobody worries about kids listening to thousands -- literally thousands -- of songs about broken hearts and rejection and pain and misery and loss.

It seems the records, tapes, and CD's will never end until... we come to ROB -- always a hair out of place, a face that grows on you. He sits in an oversized beanbag chair and addresses us, the wall of music behind him.

ROB

Did I listen to pop music because I was miserable, or was I miserable because I listened to pop music?

This combination of objects and dialogue reflects the world view of a true audiophile and obsessive music lover, capped off by the story's central thematic question in the scene's last side.



Summary

Objects are yet another tool writers have to create entertaining and informative character introductions, using items to convey something of a character's core essence, a nice visual way of translating data into the mind of a script reader.

Tomorrow in Part 11, we look at a final angle on character introductions: Surprise.