**Developmental Critique Checklist**

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**Characters:**

* Are they memorable? Do they delight the reader with surprising behaviors and ideas?
* Do they have a distinct voice—their manner of communicating and conducting themselves?
* Do the characters’ beliefs, personalities, desires, and situation contain contrasting elements?
* Do these elements of the characters create conflict within their own hearts, with the world around them, and with other characters?
* Do their goals and desires directly drive the plot?
* Do the supporting characters' goals and desires interfere with/enable the protagonist in his own major pursuit?
* Are their core beliefs/experiments in living tested by the plot?
* Do they have relatable vulnerabilities?
* Do they have compelling strengths?
* Is their journey driven by an undeniable longing?
* In a change arc, does the main character’s driving desire (or the way he goes about pursuing it) conflict with what he really needs in order to be whole and healthy?
* Are their behaviors, beliefs, and motivations consistent throughout the story?
* Do their motivations make sense? Are they relatable?
* Do the characters have a unique and thought-provoking perspective of the world around them?
* Do they have a unique perspective on the story's thematic questions?
* Are they necessary to the plot?
* Are the catalysts for character change clear and believable?
* Does character change take place at a realistic pace?
* Do the characters provoke meaningful change (positive or negative) in each other?
* Are the characters introduced in an interesting scene that showcases the essence of their desires and personalities?
* Are the protagonists proactive, resilient, and intelligent? Are they engaging enough to be worth following through the course of an entire novel?
* Do the characters' relationships highlight the differences and similarities between them and others?
* Are their decision-making processes clear, relatable, and authentic?
* Are the character's thoughts and emotional reactions clear and authentic? Are they shown rather than simply described?

**Plot:**

* Does the opening set up the necessary information through engaging action?
* Does the tension/anticipation that moves the reader forward escalate throughout the story?
* Are the stakes compelling and meaningful? Do they escalate throughout the story?
* Is the plot driven forward by a clear, tangible goal the character needs to accomplish? Is this goal consistent throughout the story?
* Are there enough obstacles in the character's path to achieving their goal? Are these obstacles tailored to target the character's weaknesses and/or emphasize their hidden strengths?
* Do the characters learn from their successes as well as failures?
* Are the events of the plot believable? Do they make sense within the story even if they stretch the limits of the real world?
* Are the characters given adequate space to process their experiences, but not so much that the story drags?
* Are the author's promises of things to come satisfyingly fulfilled, with no let-downs or loose threads?
* Are these promises set up to make the payoff seem inevitable yet delightfully unpredictable?
* Are the events of the story surprising? Do bad situations turn out worse than expected? Do good situations turn out bigger and better than expected? Do seemingly bad situations turn out to be the opposite, or vice versa? Do disasters contain a thread of grace? Do successes come at an unforeseen cost?
* Is foreshadowing woven in with other events, not so directly as to be obvious, but not so subtly as to go unnoticed?
* Does the story begin and end on time—not dragging on by starting too early or ending too late and not cutting the setup or resolution short by starting too late or ending too early?
* Is the story's resolution satisfying? Are all the loose ends dealt with?
* Does the story end with a memorable final scene rather than a laundry list of where all the characters are at?

**Theme:**

* Do the characters' decisions and actions have meaningful and appropriate consequences?
* Do these consequences influence the characters' behavior?
* Is the message shown, not told? Does it make an emotional impact rather than relying on preaching?
* Is the character given difficult dilemmas instead of obvious choices?
* Do these decisions force them to change or confirm their beliefs/experiments in living?
* Does doing the right thing come with a significant cost?
* Is the opposing viewpoint given a fair argument?
* Is the message stated explicitly enough to be clear?
* Do the character’s actions reflect their deepest beliefs/experiments in living?
* Does the story make the reader think about life from a new perspective?
* Is the theme consistent throughout the story?
* Does the story convey the message intended by the author?
* Does the achievement of the character’s goal/fulfillment of his longing come at a cost of repentance and/or sacrifice?

**Dialogue:**

* Are the character voices distinct?
* Is the dialogue unpredictable—do the characters say the fitting, but not the obvious thing?
* Is the way characters express themselves surprising and unique?
* Does the dialogue serve multiple purposes at once—setting up important plot information, revealing character, setting the tone of a scene, adding color to the setting, and supporting the theme?
* Does the conversation follow a logical flow?
* Is the characters' emotion conveyed authentically through what they say (and don't say) rather than relying on adverbs, dialogue tags, and exclamation marks to tell the reader what the characters feel?
* Does the characters' dialect feel authentic without being difficult to decipher?

**Setting and Culture:**

* Are the different cultures involved (local and national) memorable?
* Are fictional cultures unique and not exact replicas of real cultures?
* If a fictional culture is intentionally modeled on a real culture, is it well researched? Does it draw out interesting, specific details that readers might not be familiar with?
* Do the culture’s material and behavioral aspects reflect the core values of the community?
* Are fantasy and alien races original (or at least involving an original twist?)
* Are cultures portrayed as nuanced and dichotomous rather than being painted as generally good or bad?
* In real-world settings, is the characters’ behaviour culturally appropriate to that time and place?
* Are the cultural values of historical or foreign settings realistically represented rather than relying on stereotypes or morphing to fit the standards of the author’s home culture or the current time?
* Does the setting affect the characters and plot—is it necessary to the story?
* Is cultural or technical jargon explained?
* Do all five senses engage with the setting?
* Is the physical setting easy to visualize?
* Are the setting details restricted to those that are meaningful? (no unnecessary weather descriptions and irrelevant directions)
* Do the sensory details create a mood? Do they reflect the character's mindsets and emotionally foreshadow events?

**Scenes:**

* Does every scene opening create anticipation and set up expectations for what the scene will be about and where it's going?
* Do scenes have an opening and/or ending hook?
* Are the time and place set up clearly without a demanding too much attention?
* Is the point-of-view and the cast for each scene clearly established?
* Are the characters' actions in each scene driven by a clear minor goal? Does the pursuit of this goal encounter obstacles?
* Is new information revealed in every scene?
* Does every scene impact the direction of the larger plot and/or character arcs?
* Does every scene have a clear, memorable point?
* Does every scene result in a meaningful change or progression? By the end of every event or conversation, has a character gained perspective, faced the consequences of a previous decision, or made a new decision?