



What You Get is What You See F*ck the Details by Joel Quinn

People are different. Of course you know that. They see things differently. Hear things that others can't (sometimes things that aren't even there). Their perspective will change how they interpret your words. Somebody will read one of your character descriptions and say, "I thought that guy was an asshole." Somebody else will read it and say, "Really? I thought he was kinda sad."

Which one is right?

Unless you want to sit and hold the hand of every reader as you guide them through the story, you're going to have to understand that they both are. A person's experiences and biases are going to dictate their perspective. Try as you might, most of 'em ain't gonna change.

That doesn't mean your descriptions have to be bland to hit the lowest common denominator. You don't have to make everything taste like chicken. Just be aware that everyone who reads your story will not see it in the same way. And probably not even the same as you.

Fun exercise time!

Watch a television show with the sound off. No Closed Captioning, either. Find a conversation, and just watch it. You're not trying to figure out what the people are saying to each other, you're just watching their behavior. What they're doing. Their emotions and reactions. Before you know it, your brain will start filling in the blanks. You'll get the feel of the exchange, even if you never figure out what they were talking about.

Do it again, but this time watch an interview. Still with no sound or captions. It's gonna be harder to tell what's going on, because the host will present a face that fits the medium. Bubbly softballs or forehead wrinkling gravitas. On the other side will be a person presenting their own façade. An actor's next project or a politician answering for an ill-advised tweet. With no words to inform your interpretation, your imagination will have to fill them in for you. Some people do that, even when they can hear the words.

Another one? Okeedoke!

Take something you've written. A character doing something rad. Now rewrite the scene but make the character a different gender.

Pay attention to what changed. Not just in how you wrote it, but in how you read it. Those are the details that are important. That's when you hold the reader's hand. Let them see the rest of it however they want.

People are different.