

Young Author's Conference, 2021

World-building From Life

With kc dyer

Questions

Initial Foundations: Does your story...

- ...take place on earth?
- ...involve humans, animals or other life forms?

Local Environment, Nature and Geography

- What is the location of the story? Is it a city, village, house, hole in the ground?
- How is the locale laid out? Can you draw it on a map?
- Are there seasons? What's the climate like? What about the weather?
- Are local animals important? Describe them.

Science & Systems

- Are the laws of nature / physics different than on earth? How?
- What is the level of technology?
- What about the solar system? Are there multiple suns / moons?
- Describe the sky during the day. What about at night?
- What age do people live to?
- How are families structured? How does gender work? Do children grow up with their parents?
- Is time measured using clocks?
- Does time travel in only one direction? Can it be traversed?

Culture & Work

- Does the story take place in the historical past, or in an alternate past or present?
- Is there a diverse range of races, abilities, ages and genders? Is being different celebrated or feared – or even punished?
- How is communication expressed? Does everyone speak/write/compute in the same language? Is there a common language for trade?
- How do people greet each other respectfully? How is rudeness expressed? What about swearing – do they swear? Is swearing religious-based, or rudeness? Is there a hierarchy? Is it expressed with titles or other formalities? How are families formed? Do people marry for love? Who raises the children?
- Are rituals performed for weddings, funerals? Is special dress required? Different foods?
- What are the most common daily foods? Do people mostly eat meat, fish, vegetables or something else? How is food flavoured? Do these choices vary among groups?
- How are meals taken – together as a group or separately? Is it sold on the street or in stores?
- Do people eat in small or large groups?
- Are any foods considered bad, evil, magical, poison?
- Is clean water readily available to all?
- What is the structure of government? Democracy? Dictatorship? Something else?
- Who holds the power? How are people punished?
- Is there conflict or war between groups or governments?
- Do people seek out happiness? How is happiness measured?
- What is the common currency? How is money spent? Do people seek it out? How is wealth measured?

- How is power held and wielded? Are power and wealth connected?
- Is there a class system? Does slavery exist?
- What do people fear? Are there common superstitions?
- How do people dress? Are there specific fashions? Do these change?
- How do people express artistic thought?
- What is considered rude? What is considered criminal? What is considered evil?

Education and Civics

- Is education formalized? Is it available to everyone? What are schools like?
- At what age do children start school? How long do they attend?
- What is the level of literacy? Is it dependant on wealth or status? Is there a written language?
- Is there a transportation system? How does the public communicate? Is there an internet?
- Is there an accepted code of conduct or legal system? Are there militias/police/special groups to keep order?
- Is there healthcare, and is it accessible to all?
- Is there systemic taxation to pay for government programs?

Environment and Geography

- How is the planet laid out? Are there continents? Countries?
- What is the geography of this world? Is it mountainous, oceanic, forested?
- Is the land temperate, arable, freezing, tropical?
- Which natural resources are available and which are scarce?
- Is there a range of natural fauna? Birds, insects, large and small animals? Unusual creatures?

Populations

- Where and when did your civilizations begin? Are they solely populated by humans?
- Describe any non-human sentient species. Where did they come from?
- How do your differing species relate to one another? Is there trade between groups? War? Something else?
- Are unequal resources/overpopulation/hunger a problem?

Magic and Religion

- Does magic exist? If so, what are the rules? Under what conditions does it not work? What are the costs of magic? Is it accepted and legal – or not?
- Is the culture mono-theistic? Do people believe in many gods, or none?
- Are there multiple religions? Do they conflict? Do they require sacrifice? Are they magical in scope [relying on faith or lore?]
- Who has access to magic? Is it innate or a learned skill?
- What is the role of ritual in magic, if any? Are there required objects or tools?
- Are there any magical creatures?
- What can defeat religion or magic?
- What is magic generally used for?
- Are there specific locales where religion or magic are practiced? Temples? Churches? Glades?

Other

- What did we miss? What else is special about your world?