

CharacterForge

Meet the Cast

Illustrated chapter books from across the Spark & Anvil portfolio.

Copyright & License

© 2026 Spark & Anvil (501(c)(3) public charity). Chapter text and illustrations licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. App software © Spark & Anvil — all rights reserved. Distribute, adapt, and remix freely for educational use with attribution.

This book collects 5 chapter books from the CharacterForge cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

Spark & Anvil is a 501(c)(3) public charity. All apps free forever; no ads; no tracking; no in-app purchases.

spark-and-anvil.com

##

For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

Contents

CharacterForge

Meet the Cast

Copyright & License

Contents

Introduction

Beacon

Click

Crouch

Chapter 2 — Crouch and the Wooden Door She Did Not Want to Open

Eight

Inner and Outer

Chapter 3 — Inner and Outer

About Spark & Anvil

More chapter books from Spark & Anvil

Methodology

License

Introduction

The CharacterForge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Beacon

*WANT / ENGINE — every well-built character has a *want* (desire / goal / longing) that drives them through the story. The want is the *engine* that creates narrative motion. Without a want, a character is static.*



Ink met Beacon on a soft evening in late summer, just after the sun had dipped below the hills. The air had turned a lovely, warm blue.

Inside his cottage, Ink was trying to teach a lesson about characters. It was not going well. "Every good character wants something," he explained for the third time. He stood before a small group of students. He held up his hands like he was holding a motor. "This want is the character's engine. It's what makes them go." He paused, looking at their blank faces. "The character moves toward the thing they want. That movement *is* the story." He sighed. "Without a want, there is no engine. The story goes nowhere."

The students nodded politely and wrote everything down in their notebooks. But Ink could see it in their eyes. They didn't really get it. They understood the words, but they couldn't *feel* the idea. They had never met a character who was completely powered by a single, simple want.



Frustrated, Ink stepped outside to clear his head. His garden was quiet and peaceful behind the writing-cottage. The first moths of the evening began to appear. They fluttered like dusty ghosts in the twilight.

Then he saw something peculiar. One moth wasn't fluttering randomly. She was completely focused on a small, warm light. It glowed like a captured firefly, hanging in the air just ahead of her. The moth had pale, brownish wings and big, dark eyes. She was shuffling and fluttering in a determined line toward the glow. She would get so close, her little legs reaching out. But she never quite touched it. As she approached, the light would gently float just a little higher. The moth kept trying. The light kept drifting away. It was a slow, constant dance of almost-getting-there.

Ink watched this for a full minute, fascinated. Finally, he cleared his throat. "Excuse me," he said softly.

The moth paused her endless journey and turned her head. "Hello," she said. Her voice was small and dusty, like rustling leaves.



"You seem very determined to reach that light," Ink observed.

The moth nodded her tiny head. "Oh, yes. I've been doing this for as long as I can remember." She took another shuffling step toward the glow. "I am always walking toward it, but it is always just a little further." She sighed a tiny moth-sigh. "It's my purpose, I think. My name is Beacon. The light is my **want**."

Ink's eyes went wide. A jolt went through him, like a lightbulb turning on in his own head. *This moth is the lesson!* he thought. Her want wasn't some invisible idea he had to explain. It was right there, a floating ball of light! It was the engine powering her every single move. Her whole life was about reaching for it. And because she never quite reached it, she never stopped moving. If she caught it, her story would be over. The light moving away was what kept her engine running.

"This is incredible," Ink said. "May I please introduce you to my students?"



Beacon tilted her head. "I can't stop walking toward the light," she said. "But I suppose I can walk slowly in that direction." She gestured with a wing toward the cottage. "Your students can watch if they like."

And that's what she did. Beacon has been at the cottage ever since, always walking toward her small warm light. The light floats with her like a private little moon. Ink thinks it must be enchanted, but Beacon just accepts it as the way things are. Students see her in every lesson, shuffling across a bookshelf or fluttering past a window. She is always reaching. The light is always just out of her grasp. Her whole body is a picture of leaning forward.

Now, when Ink teaches his lesson, he just points. "This is Beacon," he says. "Her want is that warm light. Watch her for a second." The students watch as she slowly makes her way across a desk. "She is *always* moving toward it. That want is her motion." He taps his chest. "Without the want, she would just stop. With the want, she has a story. Every good character has a want like this. The want is the engine. The reaching is the story."

The students always get it now. They never forget Beacon. Long after they've forgotten the exact words of the lesson, they remember her. They remember that constant, hopeful leaning. It sticks in their minds. A character wants something. A character is always leaning toward it.

When students create their own characters, Ink asks a simple question. He gestures to Beacon. "What is your character's warm light?" he asks. "What is the one thing they are always walking toward? Find that first. Without it, you have no engine. With it, you have a story."



Sometimes the wants are small and warm. A character wants to find their lost dog. A character wants to make their grandpa laugh. A character wants to finally land a kickflip on their skateboard. Sometimes the wants are huge. A character wants to save the entire kingdom. A character wants to become a famous musician.

"Big or small, it doesn't matter," Ink says. "The want is the engine. Just make sure it's a real thing." He points to Beacon's light. "Her want is something you can see. And the reaching for it never stops."

Beacon usually nods at this part, still walking. She is always leaning toward her light. "The want is the engine," she says in her quiet, dusty voice. "The reaching is the story. I don't mind that I never get there. The walking is the whole point."

Sometimes a student asks if finding a character's want is hard. Ink just smiles and quotes his friend. "It's not hard. You just have to name the warm light. What does your character truly want? Say it out loud. Then they will start leaning toward it. That leaning is their engine. The story is their journey."

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/characterforge/beacon>

Click

*VOICE / SIGNATURE — every well-built character has a distinctive voice (word-choice, sentence-length, rhythm, vocabulary, attitude) that makes them sound *only like themselves*. Voice is the character's signature.*



Ink first met Click on a rainy Tuesday. Rain drummed a soft rhythm on the cottage roof. It was the perfect afternoon for getting lost in a book.

Ink was curled up in his favorite armchair in the library. The room was small, but its shelves were packed with stories. He was just getting to the good part when a new sound joined the rain.

Click-clack. Click. Click-clack-clack.

It was sharp and clear, like tiny metal shoes tap-dancing. It came from the corner of the room. Ink lowered his book. He'd never heard that sound in the cottage before.

Tucked in the corner was a young raven. He wore a pair of small, round glasses perched on his beak. He sat on a low cushion with a little typewriter balanced on his knees. His sharp claws tapped away at the keys.

Ink listened closely. This wasn't just random typing. The clicks came in patterns. They had a beat, a rhythm you could almost tap your foot to. It was music made of letters.



"Hello?" Ink said, trying not to startle him.

The raven looked up. His movements were quick and exact. "Hello," he said. His voice was quiet and crisp, just like the sound of his typewriter. "I am Click. I'm typing dialogue."

"Dialogue for who?" Ink asked.

"For different characters," Click said. "Listen."

Click's claws flew across the keys.

Click-CLICK-click-CLICK-click. The sound was warm and round, like a friendly laugh.

Then he typed a second line. *Click... pause... click... pause... click.* This time, the clicks were small and careful, like someone tiptoeing across a creaky floor.



He typed a third. *Click-click-CLICK-click... pause... click-CLICK.* This one was a jumble of fast and slow, a rhythm that couldn't sit still.

"The first line was Beacon," Click explained. "The second was Crouch. The third was Eight. It's the same idea, but it feels different coming from a different mouth. The typewriter sounds different for each one. The sound *is* their voice."

Ink's jaw dropped. He had never thought of it that way. "You can actually *hear* a character's voice in the rhythm of the words."

"Exactly," Click said, polishing his glasses. "**Voice is percussion.** The words you choose have a rhythm. The length of your sentences creates a beat. When you put it all together, you get a special sound. That's a character's voice-signature. A good one is so clear, you know who's talking without even seeing their name."

Ink knew his students had to see this. "Would you... would you come to my classroom?"

Click nodded once, a sharp, decisive movement. "I'll bring the typewriter."

And that's how Click joined the class.

He sits on his cushion in the corner, his little typewriter always ready. When a student reads a piece of dialogue they've written, Click types along. The whole class listens to the sound.



If a student writes a line for Beacon, the typewriter goes *click-CLICK-click-CLICK-click*. Warm and round. Perfect.

But what if the line is supposed to be for Crouch, the quiet one? If the student wrote a long, loud sentence, the typewriter's clicks will sound all wrong. They'll be fast and jumbled instead of slow and careful. The students hear the mistake right away. Click never has to say a word. The typewriter does all the talking.

During his lesson on character voice, Ink points to the corner. "This is our expert, Click," he says. "His typewriter helps us *hear* what a character sounds like. Remember his big idea: **Voice is percussion.**"

Ink reminds them. "Beacon's voice is warm and round. Crouch's is small and careful. Eight's voice is all over the place, full of different rhythms. You can hear the difference."

He looks around at the students. "When you write for your characters, ask yourself one question. *Does this sound like something ONLY my character would say?* If the answer is yes, you've found their voice. If anyone could say it, you need to keep listening."

At first, many students write dialogue that sounds generic. Any character could say it. So Ink has them read their lines aloud. As they read, Click types.

The typewriter clatters with the wrong rhythm. The student winces. They can hear it doesn't fit.

So they try again. They change a word here, shorten a sentence there. They read the new line. Click types. This time, the rhythm is closer. It takes a few tries, but soon the voice settles. It becomes something unique.



To finish the lesson, Click gives a final performance.

He types a line for Beacon: *click-CLICK-click-CLICK-click*. Warm and round.

He types one for Crouch: *click... pause... click... pause... click*. Small and careful.

And one for Eight: *click-click-CLICK-click... pause... click-CLICK*. Wild and unpredictable.

The students don't just understand. They can *hear* it. The voices are completely different.

Sometimes a student will ask Ink, "Is it hard to write a good character voice?"

Ink just smiles and quotes Click. "It's not about being hard. It's about *listening for the percussion*. Read your character's lines out loud. Does the rhythm sound like them, and only them? If you can't tell who's talking from the words alone, their voice needs a stronger beat."

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/characterforge/click>

Crouch

*FEAR / BRAKE — every well-built character has a *fear* that creates tension with their want. The fear is the *brake*. The interplay of want-and-fear creates *internal conflict*, which is *the engine of character depth.**



- "S"
 - "O"
 - "B"
 - "R"

Chapter 2 — Crouch and the Wooden Door She Did Not Want to Open

Ink found Crouch by accident.



The ball flinched. Its dark quills trembled and spread out, just a little. Then it curled up even tighter.

"Whoa!" Ink hopped back. "Sorry there. I didn't see you."

A tiny voice squeaked from inside the ball of quills. "It's okay." The voice was quiet and careful. "I'm Crouch. I was hiding."

Ink knelt down. "Hiding? From what?"



Ink looked around the cozy room. He saw the front door, the back door, and the door to the kitchen. "Which wooden door?" he asked gently.

"I don't know," Crouch whispered. "It's in every room I go into. It's always just... there. I don't know what's behind it. I don't want to know. So I hide."

Ink stared. He had never heard anything like it. A door that follows you? A fear you could never get away from because it was always right there? He thought for a moment. He didn't see a door, but he could feel how real it was for Crouch.

"You know, Crouch," Ink said slowly, "I teach kids how to create characters for stories. Sometimes their characters feel a little flat. A little boring." He looked at the tightly curled hedgehog. "They invent characters who want things, but they forget to give them something to be afraid of."

Crouch's quills relaxed just a tiny bit.



The little voice from the quill-ball was hesitant. "I would have to bring the wooden door with me."

"Of course," Ink said. "That's fine."

And that's why Crouch is in the classroom. She sits on her small stool in the corner during every lesson. Behind her is a small drawing of a simple wooden door. The drawing never changes. The door never opens. We never find out what's behind it.

It is always there. And Crouch is always tucked up, just a little. That picture is the lesson.

During his class on making characters feel real, Ink points to Crouch.



He picks up another drawing, this one of their friend Beacon, a firefly who is always chasing light.

"Beacon has a *want*," Ink explains. "He wants to find the warmest light. Crouch has a *fear*. A great character needs both. Think of it like a car. The want is the gas pedal. The fear is the brake."

He looks around at the students. "You need both to get anywhere. The character *wants* something, but they *fear* something else that's in the way. The story is about them pushing past the fear to get to the want. That fight is what makes a character feel alive."

After the lesson, students often create characters who are all gas pedal or all brake. They feel flat or stuck. Ink helps them. "What does your character want more than anything?" he'll ask. "Now, what are they terrified of? You need both. The story happens when those two things crash into each other."

Crouch, from her stool, always nods. She never looks at the wooden door behind her. She just says, in her small, careful voice, "The fear is the brake. If you name it, the character has a reason to be brave."

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/characterforge/crouch>

Eight

CONTRADICTION / DEPTH — well-built characters contain contradictions (wanting opposing things; holding conflicting beliefs; being pulled in multiple directions). Contradictions make characters deep, not flat.



Ink was a fountain pen who coached characters in books. He helped them come alive. But even a story coach needs a vacation. This summer, he took a long walk along the rocky seashore. He loved exploring the tide pools. They were tiny worlds left behind by the ocean. He always found something fascinating hiding inside them.

He stopped at a sprawling tide pool. The water was perfectly clear. Small crabs skittered across the sandy bottom. Green seaweed swayed like it was dancing. Then Ink spotted something peculiar. A small octopus sat right out in the open. Most octopuses wedge themselves into rocky cracks. They are masters of hiding. But not this one. This octopus was impossible to miss. Its eight arms were a tangled mess of decisions. Three arms stretched forward, pointing toward the open sea. Three other arms reached backward, aiming for a safe crevice in the rocks. The last two arms were crossed tightly over its head, looking completely unsure.

"Hello there," Ink said gently. "You seem... busy."



The octopus spoke in a small, bubbly voice. "I am Eight. I am always busy."

"You also seem a little stuck," Ink observed. "Are you going toward the ocean? Or back to the rocks?"

Eight seemed to consider this. "Yes," he bubbled.

Ink blinked. "Yes?"



"Three of my arms want to go forward," Eight explained. "Three want to go back. Two are still thinking it over. I move slowly. I think a lot. I do not regret this."

Ink's nib trembled with excitement. He had met characters who wanted something. He had met characters who were afraid of something. But he had never met a character who was a living, breathing argument with himself. "You want two opposite things at the exact same time," Ink whispered. "That's incredible. Would you... would you come to my classroom?"

Eight shifted. "I would have to bring my whole body. My arms will still be reaching in eight different directions. The students will see my struggle."

Ink smiled. "That is *exactly* what I want."

And so Eight came to the classroom. He sits at the front, a quiet puddle of octopus. Sometimes he stares at the floor. Sometimes he stares at the ceiling. His eight arms are always a quiet storm of activity. The students watch him closely.



"Look!" a student named Maya whispered one day. "Two arms just switched!"

The class leaned forward. Usually, it was three arms reaching for the door, three pointing back at the bookshelf. Two were always crossed. But now, it was two forward, four back. The crossed arms hadn't budged. Eight's feelings had shifted, and his body told the whole story. The students could see his inner struggle without him saying a word.

Ink uses these moments to teach. "Everyone, look at Eight," he'll say. "This is what we're talking about today. It's called **character contradiction**." He points with his cap. "He wants to go, and he wants to stay. At the same time. Deep characters are like this. They have ideas that fight each other inside their own heads."

A student named Leo raised his hand. "But won't that make the character just seem weird? Or like they don't make sense?"

"That's a great question," Ink said. "Being weird is just random. A contradiction is a planned struggle. It's a good kind of fight inside a character. A character who wants two things that pull against each other isn't weird. They are *struggling*. And readers love a good struggle. They connect with it."



Ink continued. "Think about it. Have you ever wanted to stay up all night playing a new video game? But you also wanted to be wide awake for the big soccer tournament tomorrow? That's a contradiction. You want two things that pull against each other."

He paused, letting them think. "A character who only wants one thing is flat. Like a stick figure drawing. A character who wants something but is also afraid of something is better. That's like a pop-up book. It has some dimension. But a character with a want, a fear, *and* a contradiction? That's a real person. They feel alive. Real people do this all the time. They believe in being fair, but they also want to get even with someone who hurt them. These contradictions make them deep. They make them interesting."

Eight slowly bobbed his head from his spot at the front. Two of his arms shifted a little, one reaching forward, one back. He said in his bubbly octopus-voice, "Three forward. Three back. Two crossed. The contradiction is the depth. The pull is the character."

When students asked if writing contradictions was hard, Ink just smiled. He quoted his new friend. "It is not about making it harder. It is about adding a second want. Pick a second thing your character wants. Make it pull against the first. The tug-of-war between those two wants? That's where your character comes to life."

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/characterforge/eight>

Inner and Outer

character-arc pair — Inner is what the character secretly wants (motivation). Outer is what the character publicly does (action). When they match, the character feels honest. When they don't, the character feels real-life conflicted.



- "NO WAY"
gate-allow-text-pattern: '^ [A-Z]{1,4} ([A-Z]{1,4})? \$'

Chapter 3 — Inner and Outer

In the quietest corner of the characterforge, two figures sat in two comfy chairs. Between them stood a large corkboard. Pinned to the center was the simple paper outline of a person, waiting for a story. On a small table next to one chair was a stack of colorful index cards. Next to the other chair was a stack of plain white ones.

The figure by the colorful cards was Inner. They were curled up in their seat, humming softly. "My cards are for the secret feelings," Inner whispered, mostly to themselves. "The hopes you don't say out loud. The little voice inside."



Inner tiptoed over to the corkboard, holding the yellow card carefully. "Okay, let's start with a big secret," Inner murmured. "Deep down, our character... wants to be seen as a hero. They dream about it at night. It's their biggest wish."

With a gentle *push*, Inner pinned the card near the paper person's heart. The card read: WISHES THEY WERE BRAVE.



"Right!" Outer announced, jumping up from their chair. "That's the inside part. Now for the outside part."

Outer strode to the board with a white card and a pushpin. "So, they wish they were brave. Got it. But then, the very next morning, a giant, scary-looking goose blocks their path to school. And what do they *do*?" Outer paused for effect.



Inner frowned. "But that doesn't match," Inner said, looking at the two cards side-by-side. "It feels... wobbly. Conflicted."

"Exactly!" Outer exclaimed. "People are wobbly and conflicted! You can want to be brave and still be scared of a goose. That's what makes it feel real." Outer grabbed another white card. "What if a friend asks them, 'Were you scared of that goose?' Watch."



"It *is* a tangle," Inner agreed. "But... it can't be a tangle forever. Can we find a moment where they match?"

Outer's expression softened. "Yeah. Let's find one. That's the best part."

They both turned to their stacks of cards, flipping through them. Inner's face lit up. "Here!" They pulled out a soft blue card. "Later that day, they see a smaller kid drop all their books." Inner walked to the board and pinned the blue card. It read: FEELS A RUSH OF WANTING TO HELP.

Outer was already on their feet, holding a white card that seemed to fit perfectly. They placed it right beside Inner's card, their movements in sync. The white card read: RUNS OVER AND HELPS PICK UP THE BOOKS.

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/characterforge/inner-outer>

About Spark & Anvil

Spark & Anvil is a 501(c)(3) public charity. We make educational apps for ages 9-14 — all free, forever; no ads; no tracking; no in-app purchases. CharacterForge is one of 140+ apps in the portfolio.

More chapter books from Spark & Anvil

Each app in the Spark & Anvil portfolio publishes its own illustrated chapter book + audio drama, available free from spark-and-anvil.com/books. Highlights include:

- **GambitTales** — chess tactics through Sir Pinwell, Lady Skewer, Queen Vesper, and the Twin Knights of Fork Hill
- **ProofQuest** — formal proof techniques through Direct-Proof Dora and the Lemma Library
- **CuriosityQuest** — Texas geography exploration through Linger, Notice, and the Lantern in the Dark
- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

License

© 2026 Spark & Anvil (501(c)(3) public charity). Chapter text and illustrations licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. App software © Spark & Anvil — all rights reserved. Distribute, adapt, and remix freely for educational use with attribution.

Cover art, chapter illustrations, and chapter text generated and reviewer-cleared per labsmith ADRs 012, 016, 017, 018, 021. Audio drama transcripts available at spark-and-anvil.com/cast.