

# World- Building

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## Part 3: Peoples

### Getting Started

Welcome, World-Builders!

Halfway! We're now on Part 3 of my six-week world-building series! In this issue, we'll be looking at all aspects of **Peoples**.

This is probably my favorite part of world-building. I love all of the different creatures and beings, from Fae to Gnomes to ones I make up!

Are you starting to see how each one of these parts of world-building ties to the others? Economic status is aligned closely with some of the topics I discussed in the government section. Family ties in closely with morals. Though I've tried to separate world-building into my six main topics, know that **everything is connected**. As it should be! If aspects of your world are not connected, that makes for a pretty disjointed world!

In this issue, I've got **Types of Peoples**, **Family Structure and Social Rites**, **Language**, and **Economic and Social Status**. Plus all my usual random writerly advice. I hope the pictures provided also inspire you on your journey! Be sure to tag me on Facebook or Instagram if something here inspired you!

I'm so excited to adventure with you!  
Michelle

### Elements of Peoples

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## Types of Peoples

Here are some typical types of fantasy beings/peoples. Keep in mind during your planning that just because they have some assumptions already made about the beings doesn't mean you can't flip the script (see my last publication on Belief Systems for details). Use these beings as a basis, but I encourage you to create your own (thinking critically about all the questions on the next page) or explore lesser known beings. I love researching Native American and Aztec creatures and deities. See what unique creatures you can find and figure out how they'll interact with your world. For the purpose of this section (otherwise it would get very long), I tried to focus on traditionally sentient beings. Don't let this sway you—look at the Redwall series—mice go on wild adventures as sentient beings.

### **Winged Peoples:**

Angels, Demons, Fae, Fairies, Sprites, Dragons, Fallen Angels, Valkyrie, Pixies, Harpies

### **Peoples of the Earth:**

Dwarves, Elves, Giants, Goblins, Gnomes, Humans, Nymphs, Druids, Ogres, Orcs, Elementals, Gremlins, Brownies, Trolls, Imps, Leprechauns, Cyclopes, Halflings, Centaurs, Moon-Eyed Peoples, Dryads

### **Beast Peoples:**

Werewolves, Vampires, Shapeshifters, Talking Animals, Satyrs, Deer Woman

### **Magic Peoples:**

Wizards, Warlocks, Witches, Sorcerers, Mages, Djinn, Genies, Hags, Demi-gods, Deities, Titans, Clerics, Priests, Monks, Oracles, Prophetesiers

### **Water Peoples:**

Merpeople, Sirens, Harpies, Naiads

### **Horror Peoples:**

Banshees, Zombies, Spirits, Ghosts, Shades, Specters, Spearfingers, Wendigos

What else would you add to this list?



## Types of Peoples

# Questions

1. What types of sentient beings are in your story?
2. How do different types of peoples feel about one another?
3. What do the beings of your world look like?
4. What physical traits differentiate different peoples? How would a random person tell different peoples apart?
5. What skills are each of the peoples of your world known for?
6. What ways do different peoples dress?
7. What are different ways your peoples act? Think?
8. Are there different physical traits within a people?
9. What types of creatures are there (non-sentient beings)?
10. How is the appearance of your beings suited to your world?
11. What traditional rules are you following about the peoples in your world? What rules are you breaking?
12. Are there hybrid beings (e.g. Half-Elf, Half-Giant)? How are these beings treated by others? Is this typical?
13. Are there different races within a people?
14. What differences are there in gender?
15. What physical differences are there in age?
16. Does magic play a role with any of your peoples?
17. What peoples ascribe to what religions?

## Family Structure and Social Rites

Within every culture, there are different family structures. A household can consist of a mother, father, and children, or it can branch beyond that to extended family. It could include concubines or servants, friends or coworkers.

Most societies also have certain social rites. For example, US society has the “coming of age” celebrations of 16 with a drivers license, 18 with high school graduation, and 21 with alcohol. These important mile markers in ones life are part of who we as a culture are societally.

Think about these two aspects in your world. And think about how to make them different.

I would love to see a fantasy where the parents of the main character are still alive and actually do something (I think it's a US socially accepted belief that life ends for parents as soon as their first child is born). I'd love to see a new mom battling dragons or a grandfather rescue his grandson from a goblin king. Play with the family structures in your world and see what structure aligns with the morals you have already established.

Social rites can be used to enhance your story or as a pivotal point. Consider also gender differences with social rites. Perhaps for females in your society, coming of age happens at 10, but for boys it happens at 16. What similarities and differences could they have? The 'becoming an adult' trope is often used in fantasy, but that isn't always a bad thing. How could you flip the script on this trope to make it unique to your world and characters?

**Golden Rule #6:** Don't make everything different.

I know, I just talked about flipping the script to make your work stand out. But it's also important to keep some traditional fantasy tropes (after all—that's part of what makes it fantasy and draws readers back time and time again). Research typical tropes and decide which will benefit your story and which you can switch. Don't change everything just for the sake of changing it. Find purpose in everything!



## Family Structure and Social Rites

### Questions

1. What is the typical family structure? Are there variances? How are these variances accepted?
2. What does a relationship before marriage look like?
3. Is there marriage? What does marriage look like? How does a marriage come about?
4. What role does sex play in your world? In the family structure in particular? Outside of the family structure?
5. How are the elderly treated in your society?
6. What is the view of death? Are there any last rites associated with death?
7. What marks the transition into adulthood? Does it vary by gender?
8. What is a typical lifespan of each of your peoples? Do any beings have immortality?
9. What is a typical job of each of your beings?
10. Are there any initiation rites or rituals?
11. What would someone have to do to be exiled from the community?
12. How many children is typical for a household?
13. Are households multi-generational?
14. How is work around the house distributed?
15. What are the different roles of different age groups?
16. Is infidelity common? Prostitution? Children born out of wedlock?
17. Is it common to live alone?

# Language

Language is the primary form of communication between peoples. And language isn't just spoken word; it's written, it's nonverbal, it's spatial. Think of language in terms of everything we communicate.

Language is heard, but it is also understood in the tempo of our speech, gestures, facial expressions, volume, and proximity.

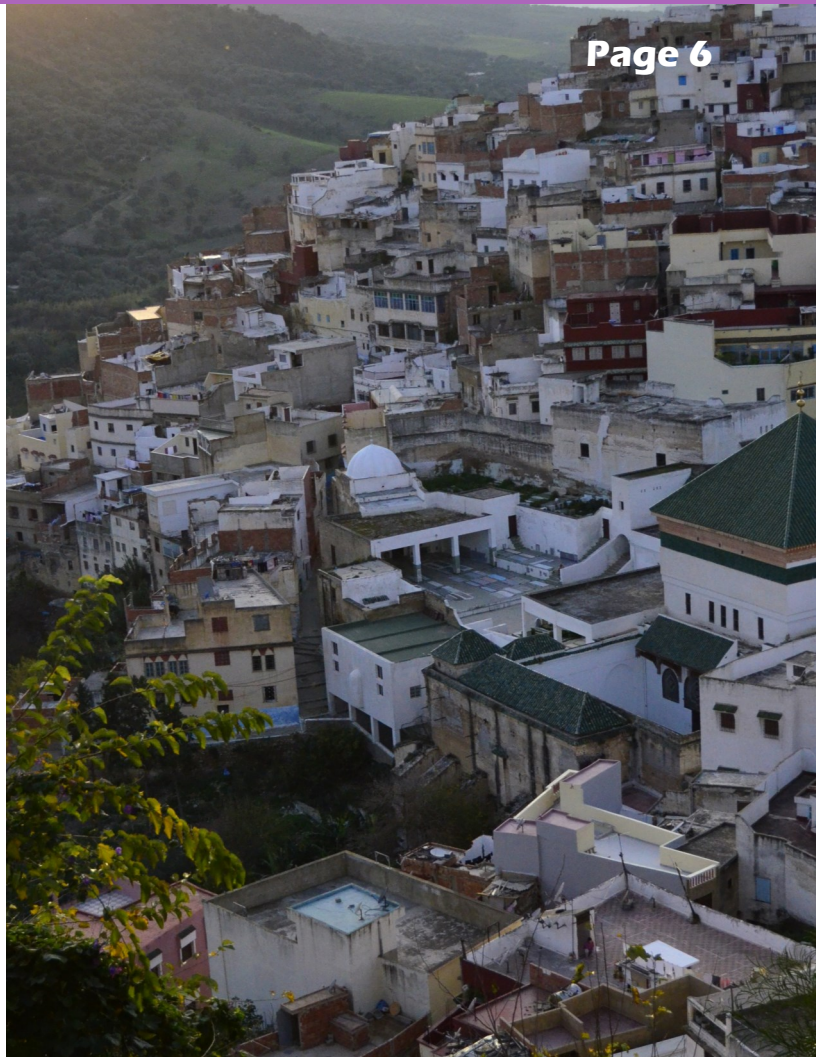
Language can communicate emotions as well as thoughts. Think about the last time you were angry at someone. How did your speech change? Study this in yourself and others and use it for emotional changes in your characters (this will help you get rid of annoying adverb tags such as he said

angrily. Readers

Random Writing Tip: When you travel, people watch for a bit. Take notes on what gestures they use, how they greet people they know and don't know. Listen to how they draw out their words or how loud they speak. All of this you can use in your writing.

should be able to understand your character is angry by their language). Gestures also change based on emotions. Using these cues in your writing can further help the reader understand your characters emotions beyond what they say. For example, your character can say, "I hate you," with a grin vs. "I hate you" with gritted teeth and communicate two different things even though you used the same words.

Think of language in all of these ways. The best writers do not need descriptions of HOW a character said something. They can show it instead by use of word choice, gestures, and other language devices.



## Golden Rule #7: Accents

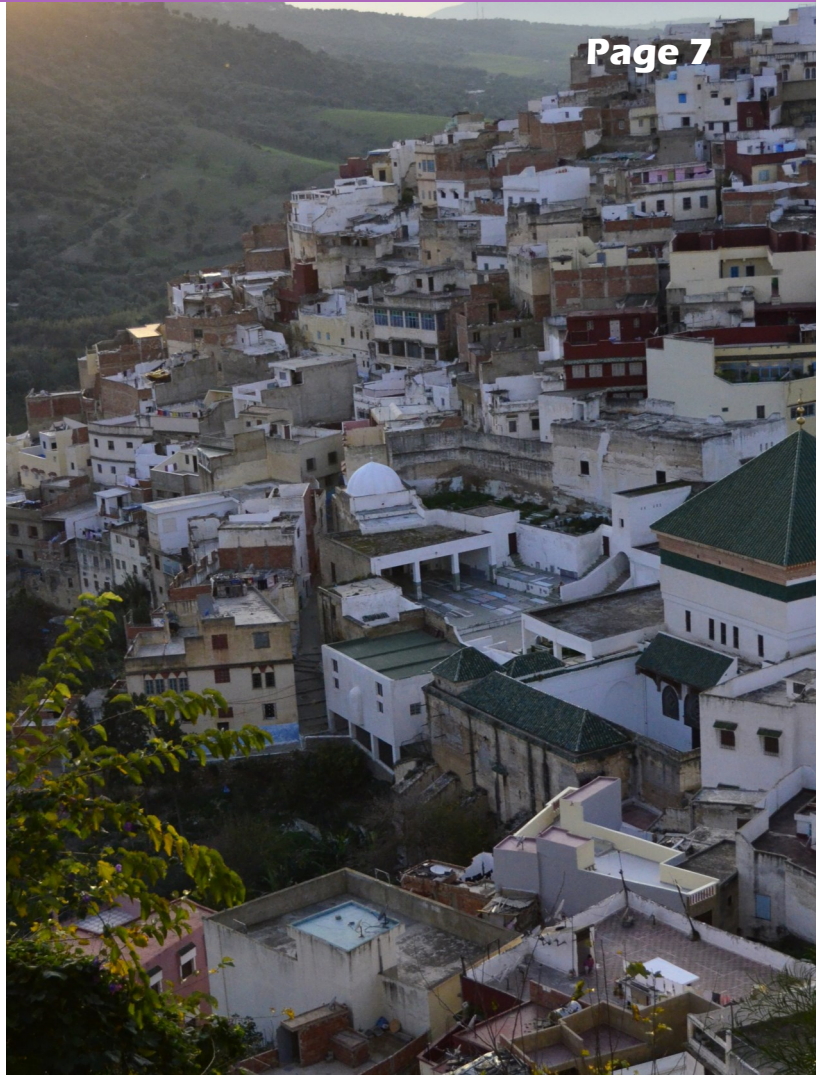
Accents can add something to your story. They can also severely distract. Use caution when writing accents. Make sure your words can still be easily understood. If your reader has to fight to understand an accent, they won't be reading for long. I typically only use accents for minor characters and for only brief periods of time. Brent Weeks does a great job at communicating accents without writing them. He describes how they sound to other peoples (e.g. slurred speech, lilting vowels, etc.). This helps the reader imagine without distracting them with odd spellings.



## Worship and Rituals

# Questions

1. What languages are spoken? Is there a common language between all peoples?
2. Are there regional dialects or accents? How is this shown in your work?
3. How do the names of peoples and places vary among various peoples?
4. Are there any common sayings in your world?
5. How do people curse? Are there any vulgar hand gestures?
6. What is a formal greeting? Informal?
7. What are nonverbal cues that various peoples have?
8. Are there any nonverbal mannerisms specific to a type of peoples?
9. How is love shown?
10. What emotions are acceptable in society? What about behind closed doors?
11. How physical is your culture? What does this communicate?
12. Is language written? Is it symbol-based or phonetic?
13. How are things communicated within a society?
14. How does news spread?
15. What volume is your language spoken in? What tempo? Are variations considered rude?
16. How is language learned? Taught?



## Economic and Social Status

Consider the elements of your world you have already begun to build (government and belief systems). How do the various peoples of your world fit into what you have already built? You should be aware of how they relate to their culture both socially and economically. Both aspects have implications on your main character's development.

When thinking about economic status, think about what makes one wealthy. Is it their job? Inheritance? A government stipend based on something else? Is it even good to be of high economic status?

Then think about social status. Many times, these things go hand-in-hand but not always. Social status can be from governmental favors, from friendships, from economic prosperity, or something else completely! Is it good to be of high economic status?

Think of how these two aspects impact your main character specifically. Do they like where they are in the social hierarchy? How does this play into relationships? How does it help or hinder your main character in their quest to achieve what they want?

As I said at the beginning, you should be starting to see now how all of these elements of world-building tie together. It's hard to isolate topics completely, because they all intertwine. Brilliant world-building is the successful melding of all of these parts in a way that makes sense to the reader.

**Golden Rule #8:** Everything must have a purpose.

When you're world building, it's easy to go off on adventures in your mind of adding this, that, and everything else to your world.

Don't.

Don't add everything you can possibly add. Don't add every mythical being or include every fantasy trope. Each creature you introduce or situation that occurs has to have a grander purpose. It doesn't have to be earth-shattering, but it does have to compel your main character forward in the story. Be honest with yourself. The worst part, as Stephen King said, is killing your darlings—those chapters that sound amazing or those characters you love, but do nothing for the story need to go!

You also have to be realistic about what works for your world. You could want to include Yetis. But your setting is in a desert. It doesn't work!

Everything must make sense. And there should be a purpose to everything!



## Economic and Social Status

### Questions

1. Is there slavery in your world? How are slaves chosen/bought? Can they earn their freedom? Is slavery common?
2. What defines the low-class? Middle-class? High-class?
3. Is there a caste system in your world?
4. How can one rise or fall in social or economic status?
5. Is there hope to "better your circumstances" in your world?
6. What privileges come with having a higher social status? What about a higher economic status?
7. What jobs are considered high-class? Middle-class? Low-class?
8. Are there any physical symbols of wealth or power? How would an outsider know who is of different social status in your society?
9. Are there servants? Who has servants? Is servitude more like slavery or more like voluntary employment?
10. What social taboos are there?
11. What are vices in your world? What impact do those vices have on ones economic and social standing?
12. Do different beings have different social and economic status within a society? Or does each set of beings have their own social and economic societies?
13. How does clothing differ between different classes?
14. Is there extreme poverty? Extreme wealth?
15. Does high economic wealth automatically equate to high social standing?



## Connect with me!

**About the Author:** My journey began one day the summer before 5th grade. I had just finished reading J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings and (in my young, naive mind) thought, if Tolkien can create such an amazing story, why can't I? I began what I continue to work on to this day, albeit with some major adjustments.

No. Strike that.

In truth, my journey began in elementary school in the days when schools had funding and therefore had print shops where you could submit your books to your teacher and she would "publish" them for you; spiral bound and laminated with your own design on the cover. I published over 25 books.

No. That's not right either.

My journey actually began one day during kindergarten when my teacher, Mrs. Johnson, brought in glossy scraps of paper that I thought looked perfect for writing books on (when in actuality, that paper was horrible and couldn't hold a pencil mark if its life depended on it). I wrote four books that year.

Well, whatever way it began, it endures. I'm a Michigander destined for adventure. Traveling is the only other pastime that stirs my soul (don't ask me my favorite destination - I don't know). When I'm not working my big girl job, I help run a comic book store with my family which means I'm always surrounded by fantastic art, good literature, mind-taxing board games, and love. A combination of cuddles from my cat (Aravis), a good cup of tea (or wine, or tequila - I'm flexible), and classical piano music is my recipe for a productive writing session. More often, I write to the sound of Office episodes and unending questions

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