

# Literary Terms & Devices

How authors convey their message using language

# CONFLICT

What types of literary conflicts are there?

In literature, a **CONFLICT** is a struggle between two opposing forces, usually a protagonist and an antagonist.

INTERNAL (occur inside a character)

or

EXTERNAL (involves outside forces)

## The Four Types of Conflict



## Man vs. Man

Sets a protagonist against a human (or *human-like*) antagonist.



## Man vs. Man

This also includes conflicts against **supernatural** or **fantasy** beings that are human-like.



## Man vs. Man

Or animal vs. animal if your protagonist is an animal.



## Man vs. Nature

Sets the protagonist against a force of nature.



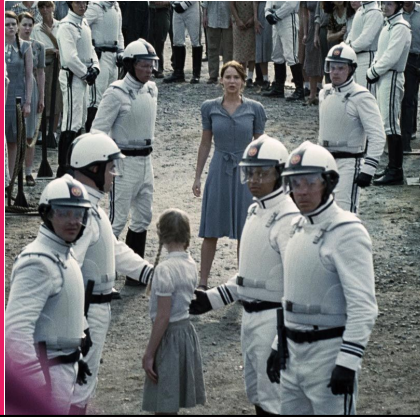
## Man vs. Nature

Can also be a conflict with living things from nature **IF** they are **not human-like** characters in the story.



## Man vs. Society

Sets the protagonist against elements of government or culture.



## Man vs. Society

This is a struggle against a whole culture, the way things are.



## Man vs. Self

Sets the protagonist against himself or herself.



## Man vs. Self

This is an INTERNAL conflict. It happens inside the character's mind.

### Examples:

- Making a decision
- Dealing with overwhelming guilt, sadness, or fear



Why is CONFLICT necessary in a story?

Internal and external conflicts are essential elements of a storyline because they are the driving force behind the main character's transformation. Without them, there would be no character evolution or resolution.

How about some practice identifying conflict?



BRENDAN SNIERLOWSKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES





How about some MORE practice identifying conflict? This time...with VIDEOS!



Mr Manly Covers TV



Now just a bit MORE...Now try identifying the conflict in the following literary excerpts!

John's hands trembled in the cold as he fished through his coat pockets for a match. He had already gathered scraps of wood and piled them up to make a fire. Now, he had to figure out how to kindle it. The sun had already set and all light was quickly fading from the sky; John could feel the temperature dropping just as rapidly. Without a match, there was no way to get this fire going, and without a fire, he wasn't sure how he would survive the night. Nobody knew he was stuck out there, alone, without food or shelter. His best hope was to try to avoid freezing, then head out at dawn to find help.

**What type of conflict is this?**

As the bus pulled up to the stop, Renee steadied herself and slowly walked toward the edge of the sidewalk. Ever since the fire, her life has taken an unexpected path. She was once beautiful, with bright blue eyes, rosy lips, and a head of dark, curly hair. Now, she shuffled slowly and had to be careful to not bump her delicate, scarred skin. The fire that burned down her home also attacked her. Instead of a light, vivacious 25-year-old, Renee resembled a 90 year old woman -- bald, twisted, and hunched over. Inside, she felt normal and glad to be alive. Outside, she was unrecognizable and frightening. She sensed the other passengers shifting impatiently as the lift slowly lowered in order for her to step onto the bus. Impatience grew as she slowly fumbled for her bus card. That impatience turned into horror as she turned to find a seat. Nobody wanted to look at the disfigured and scarred face, let alone sit next to it. Renee wanted to scream, "I'm just a person! I'm just like you!" but she had learned to suppress that urge and accept the fact that she was forever an outsider. A freak.

**What type of conflict is this?**

Mike hit the snooze button for the fifth time. He had to get up now, or else he'd be late again. After the usual cereal and coffee, stepped into the bathroom to shave and brush his teeth. Every morning, he had the same conversation with his reflection in the mirror. "Today's the day," he thought, "Today I am going to quit. I'm going to walk right into Mr. Maloney's office and tell him what I think about this stupid job, and then I'll quit. I'll leave today." Even as he rehearsed his final speech, he knew that it would never happen. The thought of being unemployed terrified him, and he was too much of a coward to speak his mind to his boss. Instead, he would work another day at a job he hated. The next morning, he began again. "Today's the day. Today I am going to quit."

**What type of conflict is this?**

I was just about to beat my high score in Call of Duty when my mom walked into the room and stood directly in front of the TV screen. "Mom! What are you doing?!" In her hand was a folded piece of paper. My report card must have arrived. This was about to get ugly. "Exactly when were you going to tell me that you are failing three classes?! You're failing gym! How do you fail gym??" I rolled my eyes and sighed, and that just made things worse. I could tell that she was waiting for me to respond, so I said, "God, Mom. It's not a big deal. I'll bring my grades up." This was probably the dumbest thing I could have said, because her face turned a deep scarlet. "Your father and I have sacrificed way too much to send you to the best school in the city. It is VERY MUCH a big deal that you are nearly failing out," she said, her voice about twice the normal volume. I responded, "Yeah, well, I didn't ask for you to make any sacrifices for me, so sorry if I don't care about that stupid school as much as you do."

**What type of conflict is this?**

Janet stared the horse Rowan in the eye. Rowan was an impatient and testy young horse, and it was Janet's job to break him in. Every day after school, she would ride her bike 5 miles out to the stables to groom, walk, and, hopefully, ride Rowan. He usually tried to run away from her or bucked around until she fell off, but it was only a matter of time before he became accustomed to her presence. Janet checked the tightness of the saddle straps, stuck her foot into the stirrup, and flung her other leg over the horse. The moment her weight landed on Rowan's back, he took off at a full gallop across the field. Janet clenched the reins, bouncing in the saddle. Just when she thought she was steady, Rowan reared back. She lost her grip and fell flat onto her back on the muddy ground. "Oh well," she thought as she picked herself up, "Try, try again."

**What type of conflict is this?**

## SUSPENSE

**What is it?**

**The sense of anticipation or worry that the author makes the reader feel.**

Suspense is the lack of certainty the author creates, leaving the reader to wonder what will happen. It draws the reader into the story and creates a sense of momentum to the plot.

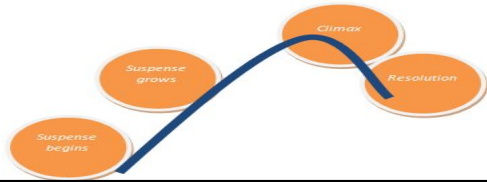


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Although the goal of resolving the conflict might be clear, there should be many ways for the character to solve that problem.

*Each event in the plot should add to the uncertainty of the reader to draw him/her further into the story.*



Authors of suspenseful literature will also focus on details such as a knock on the door, turn of a key or a shadow moving in the corner.

