

Character Types

Elements of Fiction

Overview

A character can either be...

Protagonist or **Antagonist**

Dynamic or **Static**

Round or **Flat**

We will examine each of these terms.

Protagonist

The central or main character in a story

Example

The boy in "The Boy Who Cried Wolf"

Cinderella in "Cinderella"

Sometimes the protagonist can be considered a "good" person. Other times his or her moral values are more ambiguous. Can you think of a story where the main character is not necessarily "good"?

Antagonist

The character, group of characters, or institution that opposes the **protagonist**.

Example

The Wolf from "The Boy Who Cried Wolf"

Cinderella's wicked stepmother from "Cinderella"

The **antagonist** is usually considered to be unlikeable or evil, but this is not always the case. The **antagonist** only needs to oppose the central character(s).

Dynamic Character

A character who undergoes a significant inner change

Example

At the beginning of the story, Jason has low self-esteem and no friends. He is very depressed. Then he tries out for the baseball team and gradually develops skills and confidence. By the end of the story he has completely changed. He now has many friends and is much happier.

Notice that Jason didn't just change his clothes or something minor? He underwent a major change in the course of the story; therefore, he is a **dynamic** character.

Static Character

A character that does not change significantly.

Example

John's mother loves and supports him, but John is going through a difficult time. He tore his ACL playing football and now his dreams of a college scholarship are finished. John's mother helps him find a different path by encouraging his academic interests and taking him to the library weekly. By the end of his senior year, John manages to win an academic scholarship.

Did you notice that John's mother did not change throughout the course of the text? This makes her a **static** character.

Round Character

A well-developed, lifelike character that demonstrates multiple sides, traits, and emotions.

Example

Ernie doesn't want to cheat on the test, but his Dad will punish him severely if he fails. Ernie knows that cheating is wrong, but he thinks it may be a wrong that he's willing to live with. After all, he'd rather have his conscience beating him up than his dad. Ernie considers studying for the test instead. There isn't much time, but he has pulled off some feats of concentration in the past.

Ernie demonstrates multiple, realistic sides to his personality. This makes him a **round** character.

Flat Character

An one-dimensional character that does not display emotional depth and has a single set of traits.

Example

Ricardo had an evil plan. First, he would rob the bank to get money. Then he would buy weapons and raise an army. Then he would kidnap the princess and tie her to some train tracks. Lastly, he would twist the ends of his long mustache between his thumb and forefinger while laughing.

Ricardo is a villain with little depth. We know that he is evil, but we do not learn why. No internal struggle with his morality is revealed; therefore, he is a **flat** character.

Review

- All characters are either **dynamic** or **static**, depending on whether they change significantly.
- All characters are either **round** or **flat**, depending on their depth of emotion and development.
- A character can be *either* a **protagonist**, an **antagonist**, or **neither**, depending on whether they are the central character, against the central character, or neither.

Practice

Read each the short story, analyze the characters, and then answer the questions.

When Vince got to the party, he was a little bit worried that he couldn't find his friends. Vince wasn't really an awkward person, but he found it a bit awkward to stand around at a party with a bunch of people he hardly knew. Then he bumped into one of the football players, Greg. Greg was a big guy with red hair and he always gave Vince problems. "Hey, Vince? Want a beer?" Vince looked down at his soda. "No thanks, Greg. I've got to drive." Greg walked closer to Vince and puffed out his chest. "C'mon Prince Vince, you're going to turn me down?" Vince didn't have anything against drinking, even though he wasn't of the legal age, but his cousin had died in an alcohol related car accident, and he wouldn't make the same mistake. "I'm going to have to. Not tonight, Greg," Vince said as he walked passed Greg, noticing that some of his friends had arrived. Greg crushed a beer can in his hand and grunted.

1

Who is the protagonist and who is the antagonist?

Answer

Antagonist: Greg

Protagonist: Vince

2

Is Greg a dynamic character or a static character?

Answer

Greg is a static character because he does not make any significant changes in the course of the story.

3

Is Vince a dynamic character or a static character?

Answer

Vince is a static character because he does not make any significant changes in the course of the story.

4

Is Greg a flat character or a round character?

Answer

Greg is a flat character because he appears as a single-sided bully who shows little depth.

5

Is Vince a round character or a flat character?

Answer

Vince is a round character because he displays multiple character traits and lifelike reasoning. He appears both nervous and confident. He is nervous that he is at the party alone, but he confidently resists Greg's peer pressure. Readers also learn a little bit about his past and why he declines Greg's offer.