Conflict in Literature

Conflict & its Types

Conflict

The plots of most stories centers around conflict. A conflict is a struggle between opposing forces.

External conflict

A struggle between a character and an outside force is an EXTERNAL conflict.

Internal conflict

A struggle that takes place in a character's mind is called INTERNAL conflict.

The importance of conflict

Conflict is necessary to every story. In short stories, there is usually one major conflict. In longer stories, there could be several conflicts.

Conflict adds excitement and suspense to a story. The conflict usually becomes clear to the beginning of a story. As the plot unfolds, the reader starts to wonder what will happen next and how the characters will handle the situation. Many readers enjoy trying to predict the final outcome.

The excitement usually builds to a high point, or climax. The climax is the turning point of the story. Something has happened to resolve the conflict.

Types of conflict

5 MAIN TYPES of CONFLICT

1. Person vs. Person (External)

2. Person vs. Society (External)

3. Person vs. Nature (External)

4. Person vs. Fate (External)

5. Person vs. Self (Internal)

Person vs. person: A problem with another character

This is the most obvious form of conflict, when a character in a book struggles with another character in the book. This can be in the form of arguments, conflicting desires, opposing goals, physical confrontations or emotional dilemmas.

Person vs. society: problem with the laws or beliefs of a group of people

When the character is repressed by society and not by a specific character, the conflict takes place between that character and society. This may be a result of prejudice or the character's refusal to follow the rules of his/her society.

Person vs. NATURE: problem with the environment

Sometimes the conflict in the book is between all the people and forces of nature that are out of the characters' control. It may even be that all the characters in the book are the good guys and the conflict centers around their struggle with nature.

Person vs. Fate: problem that seems to be uncontrollable

This conflict occurs when a character is compelled to follow an unknown destiny. Person versus fate conflict may lead to internal conflict, while forcing a character to consciously, or subconsciously, act on his or her fate.

Person vs. SELF: problem deciding what to do or think

When a character struggles with moral dilemmas, emotional challenges or desires he or she deems immoral, the conflict is with the character's own soul or conscience.