

## **Types of Conflict in Literature: What is Internal and External Conflict?**

### **What is conflict?**

Conflict gives a story meaning and motivation. Conflict is a struggle between two different forces - opposing forces. It can be a batter and a pitcher in a baseball game. The subtle grimace a parent makes when reviewing a report card. Conflict is a regular part of our everyday lives. Aside from conflict in literature we see conflict on the news, sitcoms, movies and reality TV. We experience our own conflict on the road, school or in the workplace. Conflict is everywhere and most of us are on a mission to resolve our conflict. And, so do the characters in novels, short stories and various other narratives.

### **Conflict: Internal and External**

There are two types of conflict in literature:

Internal conflict is within the character's mind. Internal conflict can be described as a struggle between opposing forces of desire or emotions within a person.

External is a conflict between a character and an outside force.

### **Categories of Conflict**

- Man vs Nature (external)
- Man vs Man (external)
- Man vs Self (internal)
- Man vs Society (external)
- Conflict: Man vs Fate/God (external)

### **Conflict: Man vs Nature**

External

•This type of conflict portrays a story's main character or characters against a natural force such as a natural disaster, a fire, an aggressive animal, illness or environmental issues.

Tsunami in Japan

Earthquake in Haiti

Hurricane Katrina

BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico

### **Conflict: Man vs Self**

Internal

•The character struggles to overcome a fear, perhaps an addiction, emotional issues or personal crossroads in life. This type of conflict can be indirectly shared by other characters as supporters or simply as witnesses. Internal conflict can include troubles with decision making, personality traits, spirituality or physical disabilities.

### **Conflict: Man vs Man**

External

•This conflict is usually the protagonist dealing with the antagonist. The antagonist provides some form of conflict against the protagonist. The conflict can be physical or mentally stressful.

### **Conflict: Man vs Society**

External

- In many stories, the protagonist battles an unjust form of government, culture, possibly a holiday or any society based group. This could also include Man VS Church.

**Conflict: Man vs Fate/God**

External

- In many stories, the protagonist faces forces beyond themselves to the extent that their story is predetermined by fate or God.