

1. Stock characters

A stock character is a fictional type of character who readers recognise from many different texts or films. They usually embody similar qualities which do not really change from one text to another, hence why they are so recognisable. You will find some examples of different stock characters on this mat. *Can you think of any "typical" types of characters from books or films?*

2. Protagonists and Antagonists

Protagonist and antagonist come from the Greek Language. "Protagonist" is made up of "pro", meaning most important, and "agonistes" meaning "actor".

"Antagonist" is made up of the Greek "antag" meaning working against or a struggle and "agonistes" meaning "actor".

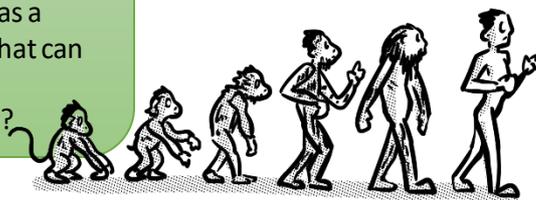
A protagonist is the main character in a piece of fiction. The story will sometimes use the protagonist as a focalizer (it focuses on this one main character throughout – it's almost their story). An antagonist is usually a character who goes against the protagonist.

- How many protagonists and antagonists can you think of in a novel that you have recently read?

3. Flat and round characters

Another way of referring to characters is as "flat" or "round". Typically flat characters are relatively uncomplicated and do not change during the course of the story. On the other hand, a round character is usually more complex and has a multifaceted personality. They usually undergo a change or development that can sometimes even surprise readers.

- Consider the fairy tale Cinderella. Who are the flat and round characters?



4. A foil and a confidant

A foil character is usually one whose traits or personality highlights and potentially contrasts with the personality traits of another character. A foil exists simply to illuminate an aspect of another character.

A confidant character is usually a friend or servant in whom the protagonist confides and tells his secrets.



5. Propp's Character Theory

Propp claimed that the same eight "types" of characters appear repeatedly in Literature.

- 1. Hero** In every story there is usually a focalizer character, usually the protagonist, who is the key person that the story is told around. Although this character is usually a hero, or has heroic qualities, they may also take on another form, for example a victim, or someone who is seeking answers, knowledge or treasure.
- 2. Villain** This character usually acts as an antagonist and seeks to thwart the hero. A true villain is usually morally bad and may try to tempt the hero. A successful villain needs to have an ultimate goal, usually associated with power. A true villain usually lacks any sort of empathy but is incredibly clever as they typically outsmart other characters. Their appearance is often striking and their negative actions result in doom for other characters.
- 3. The helper** This character usually supports the hero and often this character is wise and appears at important moments to offer support.
- 4. Donor** This character usually provides the hero with something, a weapon, knowledge, advice, an object, etc., to help them in their quest.
- 5. False Hero** Usually this character provides a potential complication or obstacle in the plot. They will usually try to take credit for the hero's actions. They are typically a usurper, a thief, somebody who manipulates people's good nature.
- 6. Dispatcher** This character usually sends the hero on an adventure or mission and sometimes can be a parental figure.
- 7. The Princess** They may be a character who the hero seeks, or maybe the hero's reward. Sometimes this character may work more closely with the hero as she may accompany him on his mission.
- 8. The Princess's Father** This character usually sends the hero on an adventure to save the princess. At other times, this character may constrain the princess, acting as a protector of his daughter.

6. Nomenclature – the study of names

When considering characters, it is always important to think carefully about their name. Writers spend a lot of time choosing a character's name because of associations we make. For example: what type of character is Cruella? Miss Honey?
How many aptly named villains can you think of?
How many aptly named heroes can you think of?

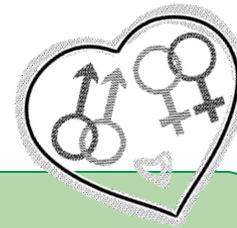
7. The tragic hero

This type of heroic character is usually flawed (makes a mistake in judgement) in some way. Readers or audiences usually fear the tragic hero because there is usually something about their character which is a bit unnerving. A tragic hero usually falls from greatness in the eyes of readers or audiences. Literature is typically inundated with this kind of character. How many can you think of? Why might Severus Snape in Harry Potter, or Peter Pan in Disney be regarded as tragic heroes?

9. Analysing characters

As well as identifying types of characters, it is important to explore specific aspects of their characterisation when analysing a character. When exploring a character it is important to think about:

- their motivations
- their relationships with other characters
- their role in the narrative
- their dialogue
- their appearance
- their actions
- their name (nomenclature)
- their reputation.



8. Typical female characters

- Damsel in distress – typically a young, beautiful and innocent character who needs saving by the hero.
- An evil step mother – usually a vicious and controlling female who has a dominant relationship with a young girl.
- Femme fatale – a beautiful, seductive female character who usually leads the male protagonist to doom.
- A woman who descends into madness.
- The Amazonian woman - strong, powerful and independent female who is competitive and identifies with feminism and nature.
- A maternal figure, quite loving and protective.
- Studious and intelligent woman who aligns herself with powerful men.
- Decisive leader, sometimes inflexible; workaholic; sometimes arrogant. If character is a mother and most of her management revolves around her family, then she can be called the matriarch.



KS3 Spine
Character

Key Vocabulary

Read through the information on this mat and write your own definitions for the key vocabulary relating to character:

Word	Definition
Focalizer	
Protagonist	
Nomenclature	
Antagonist	
Flat character	
Femme fatale	
Round character	
Villain	
Tragic hero	
Flaw	
Foil character	
Confidant	