

examples of attitude in literature

Examples of Attitude in Literature: Exploring Character Mindsets and Their Impact

Literature offers a vast canvas for exploring the intricate tapestry of human emotion and thought, with character attitude serving as a cornerstone of compelling storytelling. Understanding different examples of attitude in literature allows readers to delve deeper into motivations, predict actions, and appreciate the nuances of character development. From defiance and optimism to cynicism and resignation, attitudes shape not only individual characters but also the very fabric of the narratives they inhabit. This article will explore a diverse range of attitudes found in literary works, examining how authors utilize them to create memorable characters and drive plot. We will uncover how varying perspectives, from rebellious spirits to those marked by despair, illuminate universal human experiences and provide profound insights into the nature of the human psyche. By dissecting these literary attitudes, we gain a richer appreciation for the power of perspective in shaping both fictional worlds and our own understanding of the human condition.

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Understanding the Concept of Attitude in Literature

Attitude in literature refers to a character's settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically reflected in their behavior and outlook on life. It is the underlying disposition that influences how a character perceives the world, interacts with others, and responds to challenges. An attitude is more than just a fleeting emotion; it's a persistent mental and emotional state that colors a character's entire existence within the narrative. It encompasses their beliefs, values, assumptions, and overall perspective, acting as an internal compass guiding their journey.

Defining Character Attitude

Character attitude is a fundamental element of characterization. It's the lens through which a character views events, other people, and themselves. This internal state can be shaped by a character's past experiences, upbringing, social environment, and personal philosophies. Authors meticulously craft these attitudes to make characters believable, relatable, and impactful. A character's attitude can be readily observed through their dialogue, actions, internal monologue, and the reactions of other characters towards them. It's the invisible force that drives their decisions and defines their place within the story.

The Significance of Attitude in Characterization

The significance of attitude in characterization cannot be overstated. It's what makes a character feel three-dimensional and authentic. A character with a consistently optimistic attitude might face adversity with resilience, while a cynical character might approach the same situation with distrust and despair. These contrasting attitudes create dramatic tension and provide opportunities for exploring different facets of the human experience. Furthermore, a character's attitude can evolve throughout a narrative, reflecting personal growth, trauma, or a change in their understanding of the world. This evolution is often central to the story's arc and thematic development. The way a character feels about something is often as important as what they do.

Positive Attitudes and Their Literary Manifestations

Positive attitudes in literature often serve to inspire, uplift, and demonstrate the power of human resilience. Characters who embody these mindsets tend to face challenges with a degree of optimism, a belief in the good, or a steadfast determination to overcome obstacles. These attitudes can manifest in various ways, influencing their interactions and the overall tone of the narrative.

Optimism and Hope

Optimism, a belief that good things will happen, is a powerful positive attitude. Characters exhibiting optimism often see the silver lining in difficult situations, maintain a cheerful disposition, and inspire hope in those around them. This can be seen in characters like Pip from Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, whose early aspirations and belief in a brighter future fuel his journey, despite numerous setbacks. Similarly, the enduring hope of Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* allows him to strive for redemption and goodness even after immense suffering.

Determination and Resilience

Determination, a firm resolve to achieve a goal, and resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity, are closely linked positive attitudes. Characters with these traits refuse to give up, even when faced with overwhelming odds. Think of Katniss Everdeen from Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, whose unwavering determination to survive and protect her loved ones drives the narrative. Her resilience in the face of brutal challenges makes her an enduring symbol of defiance and hope.

Courage and Bravery

Courage, the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty, is another key positive attitude. Characters who display bravery often stand up for their beliefs, protect the vulnerable, and face danger head-on. Atticus Finch in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* exemplifies moral courage, defending Tom Robinson despite societal pressure and prejudice. His quiet bravery serves as a moral anchor for his children and the community.

Negative Attitudes and Their Literary Manifestations

Conversely, negative attitudes in literature often create conflict, drive plot through destructive behavior, and explore the darker aspects of the human psyche. These mindsets can lead characters to make poor choices, alienate others, and contribute to tragic outcomes.

Cynicism and Pessimism

Cynicism, a distrust of human sincerity or integrity, and pessimism, a tendency to see the worst aspect of things or believe that the worst will happen, are common negative attitudes. Characters with these outlooks often anticipate failure, doubt the motives of others, and express a general disillusionment with the world. Ebenezer Scrooge from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* is a quintessential example of a cynical and pessimistic character whose transformation highlights the impact of shifting one's attitude. Before his

supernatural encounters, his world is defined by suspicion and isolation.

Anger and Resentment

Anger, a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility, and resentment, bitter indignation at having been treated unfairly, can fuel characters' actions and create significant dramatic tension. These attitudes can lead to revenge plots, destructive relationships, and a pervasive sense of bitterness. Heathcliff from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is a prime example of a character consumed by anger and resentment stemming from his mistreatment, driving his actions with a relentless and destructive passion.

Apathy and Indifference

Apathy, a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern, and indifference, a state of not caring, can also be powerful negative attitudes. Characters exhibiting these traits may seem detached, unmotivated, or unwilling to engage with the world around them. This can lead to missed opportunities, stagnation, and a sense of emptiness. Meursault from Albert Camus's *The Stranger* embodies a profound indifference to societal norms and conventional emotional responses, making his attitude a central point of philosophical inquiry.

Complex and Evolving Attitudes in Literary Characters

While some characters may exhibit a singular dominant attitude, many of the most compelling literary figures possess complex and evolving attitudes. These characters are not static; their perspectives shift and change in response to their experiences, leading to nuanced character arcs and deeper thematic exploration.

The Impact of Experience on Attitude

A character's experiences are often the catalyst for changes in their attitude. Trauma, loss, love, or moments of profound realization can fundamentally alter how a character views themselves and the world. For instance, the gradual disillusionment of Daisy Buchanan in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* reflects how her sheltered life and pursuit of wealth lead to a deepening sense of cynicism and a compromised moral compass. Her initial perceived naivete gives way to a more self-serving and detached perspective.

Internal Conflict and Shifting Perspectives

Internal conflict often arises when a character grapples with conflicting attitudes or when their ingrained outlook is challenged. This internal struggle can lead to profound personal growth or significant downfall. Hamlet's famous indecision and philosophical brooding in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* showcase a mind wrestling with grief, duty, and the morality of

revenge, leading to a constantly shifting internal landscape and outward behavior.

The Nuance of Ambivalence

Ambivalence, the state of having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something or someone, adds another layer of complexity to character attitudes. Characters who are ambivalent may struggle with difficult decisions, showing both hope and despair, or loyalty and betrayal. This can make them more relatable and their journeys more compelling. Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* initially holds a prejudiced attitude towards Mr. Darcy, which gradually evolves as she confronts her own assumptions and his true character, demonstrating a significant shift driven by her evolving perception.

The Role of Attitude in Shaping Literary Themes and Plot

A character's attitude is not merely an isolated personality trait; it is a driving force that shapes the central themes of a literary work and propels the plot forward. The collective attitudes of characters within a story contribute to its overall message and impact.

Attitude as a Catalyst for Conflict

Differing or opposing attitudes are often the bedrock of literary conflict. Whether it's a clash between optimism and despair, duty and self-interest, or tradition and rebellion, these contrasting mindsets create the tension that keeps readers engaged. The persistent defiance of the colonists' attitude towards British rule in historical narratives, for example, directly fuels the American Revolution as a plot element.

Attitude and Thematic Exploration

Literary themes are frequently explored through the lens of character attitudes. A story might examine the corrupting influence of greed through a character's avaricious attitude, or the power of love through a character's unwavering devotion. The theme of social injustice in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is powerfully conveyed through Atticus Finch's principled and courageous attitude in the face of racial prejudice.

The Influence of Collective Attitudes

The prevailing attitudes within a society or community depicted in a novel can also be a thematic concern. A story might critique a society characterized by conformity, apathy, or a sense of entitlement by showcasing the attitudes of its inhabitants. The oppressive atmosphere and the collective resignation of the citizens in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* contribute to the novel's overarching theme of totalitarian control and the suppression of individual thought.

How Authors Convey Character Attitude

Authors employ a variety of techniques to effectively convey a character's attitude to the reader. These methods are crucial for building believable characters and immersing the audience in the narrative world.

Dialogue and Speech Patterns

The way a character speaks – their word choice, tone, and sentence structure – is a primary indicator of their attitude. Sarcastic remarks, hesitant questions, or confident declarations all reveal underlying perspectives. For instance, the blunt and often dismissive dialogue of Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* immediately establishes his disillusioned and critical attitude towards the adult world.

Actions and Behavior

A character's actions, both grand and subtle, speak volumes about their attitude. A selfless act might reveal generosity, while a pattern of impulsive behavior could indicate recklessness. The consistent efforts of the protagonists in *The Lord of the Rings* to carry out their perilous quest, despite immense personal cost, highlight their courageous and determined attitudes.

Internal Monologue and Thought Processes

When authors provide access to a character's inner thoughts, readers gain direct insight into their attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. This allows for a deeper understanding of their motivations, even if their outward behavior doesn't always reflect their true sentiments. The introspective and often melancholic thoughts of the characters in Virginia Woolf's novels, such as in *Mrs. Dalloway*, offer a profound glimpse into their inner lives and evolving attitudes.

Description and Authorial Commentary

Authors can also directly describe a character's attitude or use narrative commentary to guide the reader's perception. Adjectives, adverbs, and descriptive passages can paint a clear picture of a character's disposition. The author's descriptions of Lady Macbeth's ambition and ruthless drive in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are crucial in establishing her formidable and ultimately destructive attitude.

Examples of Attitude in Literature: Specific Case

Studies

Examining specific characters allows for a more concrete understanding of how various attitudes are portrayed and their impact on the narrative.

Attitude of Defiance: Winston Smith in Nineteen Eighty-Four

Winston Smith's attitude in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is one of quiet, internal defiance against the oppressive regime of Oceania. Despite the omnipresent surveillance and the crushing weight of the Party, Winston harbors rebellious thoughts and a desperate desire for truth and individual freedom. His clandestine diary writing and his search for the Brotherhood are manifestations of this defiant attitude. His eventual capture and psychological reconditioning, however, demonstrate the immense power of the state to crush even the most deeply held personal convictions, leading to a tragic shift in his attitude from resistance to absolute submission.

Attitude of Optimism: Pollyanna Whittier in Pollyanna

Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* centers on a young girl whose defining attitude is an almost unwavering optimism, famously known as the "Glad Game." Even after being orphaned and sent to live with her stern Aunt Polly, Pollyanna finds reasons to be glad in every situation, no matter how dire. Her relentless positivity influences everyone she meets, gradually softening hearts and transforming the bleak outlook of the townspeople. Her attitude serves as a powerful testament to the impact of perspective on well-being and community.

Attitude of Nihilism: Ivan Turgenev's Bazarov in Fathers and Sons

Bazarov, a central character in Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, embodies a nihilistic attitude. He rejects all societal norms, traditions, and authorities, believing in nothing beyond what can be empirically proven. His scientific worldview and his disdain for sentimentality and romanticism shape his interactions and often lead to friction with the older generation. Bazarov's nihilism is not just an intellectual stance; it deeply influences his emotional detachment and his approach to relationships, ultimately contributing to his tragic end, as his rigid adherence to his worldview leaves him ill-equipped to handle the complexities of life and love.

Attitude of Resignation: Mrs. Dalloway in Mrs. Dalloway

Clarissa Dalloway, the protagonist of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, often exhibits an attitude of elegant resignation. As she plans a party, she reflects on her life, her past choices, and the societal expectations placed upon her. While she possesses a certain vivacity and a capacity for deep feeling, there's an underlying sense of accepting her fate

and the limitations of her social position. Her internal monologue reveals a complex interplay of past regrets and present duties, often settling into a quiet acceptance of her circumstances, even while yearning for something more profound. This nuanced attitude of resignation allows for a deep exploration of the female experience within a specific historical and social context.

Conclusion: The Enduring Power of Attitude in Literary Impact

In conclusion, exploring diverse examples of attitude in literature reveals its profound impact on character development, plot progression, and thematic resonance. Whether it's the unwavering optimism of Pollyanna, the defiant spirit of Winston Smith, the cynical worldview of Bazarov, or the elegant resignation of Mrs. Dalloway, each attitude shapes how a character navigates their world and influences the reader's understanding. Authors masterfully employ dialogue, action, and internal thought to convey these crucial aspects of personality. Ultimately, the study of character attitudes offers a rich lens through which to examine the complexities of the human condition, reminding us of the power of perspective and the enduring influence of inner disposition on our lives and the stories we tell.

Frequently Asked Questions

How does a character's defiance often manifest in literature, and what impact does it have on the narrative?

Defiance in literature can be shown through open rebellion, subtle acts of disobedience, or questioning of authority. This attitude often drives the plot forward, challenges societal norms within the story, and can lead to significant character development or conflict.

What is the role of cynicism in shaping a character's perspective and interactions in literary works?

Cynicism often presents a character as distrustful of human sincerity or motives. This attitude can lead to witty, sarcastic dialogue, a pessimistic outlook on the world, and can create dramatic irony as their expectations are often met, reinforcing their jaded view.

In what ways does optimism serve as a driving force for characters in literature, and what are its potential pitfalls?

Optimism fuels characters to overcome obstacles with hope and a belief in a positive outcome. It can inspire others and lead to resilience. However, unchecked optimism can

sometimes make characters naive, leading them to underestimate dangers or ignore warnings.

How does a character's ambition, both positive and negative, influence their actions and the overall theme of a literary work?

Ambition can drive characters to achieve great things, pursue dreams, and innovate. Conversely, it can also lead to ruthlessness, moral compromise, and a disregard for others. This duality often explores themes of power, success, and the cost of achieving one's goals.

What does it mean when a character exhibits a submissive attitude in literature, and how does this contribute to the power dynamics in a story?

A submissive attitude often involves a character deferring to others, accepting authority without question, or yielding to pressure. This can highlight power imbalances, create vulnerability, or serve as a quiet form of resistance or observation, often revealing more about those in power.

How does a character's curiosity shape their journey and the unfolding of mysteries or conflicts in a narrative?

Curiosity drives characters to explore the unknown, seek answers, and uncover secrets. This attitude often propels the plot, leads to new discoveries, and can sometimes put the character in perilous situations, adding suspense and intrigue to the story.

What are some common literary portrayals of arrogance, and how does this attitude typically impact a character's relationships and fate?

Arrogance is often shown through boastfulness, condescension, and an inflated sense of self-importance. This attitude can alienate characters from allies, blind them to their own flaws, and frequently leads to their downfall, serving as a cautionary tale about pride.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to examples of attitude in literature, with descriptions:

1. The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger

This novel explores the rebellious and disillusioned attitude of its teenage protagonist, Holden Caulfield. He navigates the phoniness he perceives in the adult world with a cynical and often contemptuous outlook. Holden's narrative voice is characterized by its raw honesty and a deep-seated longing for authenticity. His journey reflects a profound struggle

against societal expectations and a desire to protect innocence.

2. Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

This classic novel delves into the attitudes of pride and prejudice, primarily through the characters of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth's initial spirited and independent attitude is challenged by her preconceived notions of Darcy, while Darcy's proud demeanor masks his evolving feelings. The story masterfully portrays how deeply ingrained attitudes can lead to misunderstanding but also how they can be overcome through introspection and empathy. Their journey illustrates the impact of social class and personal judgment on relationships.

3. Moby Dick by Herman Melville

The central attitude in this epic is Captain Ahab's all-consuming, monomaniacal obsession with the white whale, Moby Dick. Ahab's defiant and vengeful attitude drives the entire voyage, prioritizing his personal quest for retribution above all else. This relentless pursuit embodies a spirit of rebellion against nature and a tragic refusal to accept fate. The novel explores the destructive potential of a singular, unyielding attitude.

4. To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

The novel is characterized by a variety of attitudes, most notably Scout Finch's innocent yet observant perspective and Atticus Finch's unwavering moral conviction. Atticus embodies an attitude of quiet courage and principled justice in the face of racial prejudice. Scout's growing understanding of the world around her, particularly regarding empathy and fairness, shapes her evolving attitude towards society. The book highlights the impact of tolerance and understanding.

5. 1984 by George Orwell

This dystopian novel presents a society where the ruling Party instills a pervasive attitude of obedience and fear through constant surveillance and propaganda. The protagonist, Winston Smith, harbors a rebellious attitude, seeking truth and freedom in a world that suppresses individuality. The narrative explores the manipulation of thought and the suppression of dissent through the Party's control over language and history. The pervasive atmosphere demonstrates the power of an oppressive societal attitude.

6. The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde

The novel showcases Dorian Gray's hedonistic and amoral attitude towards life, driven by a desire for eternal youth and pleasure. His aestheticism leads to a profound detachment from the consequences of his actions, fostering a cynical and self-serving outlook. The story illustrates how a life lived without moral consideration can corrupt the soul. Dorian's changing portrait reflects the outward manifestation of his inner moral decay.

7. The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Gatsby's unwavering belief in the American Dream and his romantic attitude towards Daisy Buchanan are central to the narrative. His relentless optimism and extravagant lifestyle mask a deep-seated insecurity and a longing for a past that cannot be recaptured. The novel critiques the superficiality and moral emptiness often associated with the Roaring Twenties, highlighting the often-disillusioned attitudes of the wealthy elite. Gatsby's aspirational attitude ultimately leads to tragedy.

8. A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams

This play powerfully portrays the fragile and often desperate attitudes of its characters,

particularly Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski. Blanche's delicate, illusionary attitude clashes with Stanley's brutish, realistic demeanor, leading to intense conflict. The play explores themes of illusion versus reality and the crushing weight of societal pressures on individuals. Their clashing attitudes reveal the destructive consequences of clinging to fantasies in a harsh world.

9. The Stranger by Albert Camus

Meursault, the protagonist, exhibits an indifferent and detached attitude towards societal norms and emotional conventions, famously demonstrating a lack of reaction at his mother's funeral. His philosophical outlook, bordering on existential apathy, leads him to commit a senseless act of violence. The novel examines the absurdity of existence and the detachment one can feel from the human experience. Meursault's unfeeling attitude challenges conventional morality and societal expectations.

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