

internal and external conflict worksheet

internal and external conflict worksheet is an invaluable tool for writers seeking to deepen their understanding of character development and plot construction. This comprehensive guide will explore the nuances of internal and external conflicts, providing insights into how to effectively utilize an internal and external conflict worksheet to analyze literary works and enhance your own creative writing. We will delve into the definitions, examples, and the crucial role these conflicts play in driving narrative forward, ultimately empowering you to craft more compelling and resonant stories. Understanding how characters grapple with internal struggles and face external challenges is fundamental to creating believable and engaging narratives.

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Understanding Internal Conflict: The Battle Within

Internal conflict, often referred to as character vs. self, is the struggle that occurs within a character's own mind. It's the battle between opposing desires, beliefs, duties, or emotions. This type of conflict is crucial for character development as it reveals a character's values, fears, and moral compass. It's where we see characters wrestling with difficult decisions, overcoming personal flaws, or confronting their own internal demons. A well-developed internal conflict makes a character relatable and adds depth to their journey.

Defining Internal Conflict in Literature

Internal conflict arises when a character faces a dilemma that is rooted in their own psychology or personal beliefs. This can manifest as a struggle between what they want to do and what they feel they should do, or a conflict between two equally desirable but mutually exclusive choices. It's the

internal monologue, the self-doubt, the guilt, or the ambition that drives a character's actions and reactions within the narrative. Effectively portraying internal conflict often involves delving into a character's thoughts, feelings, and motivations.

Examples of Internal Conflict in Famous Works

Many iconic literary characters are defined by their internal struggles. Consider Hamlet's indecisiveness and his battle with grief and revenge, or Elizabeth Bennet's prejudice and her eventual overcoming of it in "Pride and Prejudice." Another prime example is Frodo Baggins's constant struggle against the corrupting influence of the One Ring in "The Lord of the Rings." These characters' internal battles are as compelling as any external threat they face, making them memorable and profound.

The Role of Internal Conflict in Character Arc

A character's internal conflict is often the primary catalyst for their growth and transformation, or their downfall. As characters confront and, ideally, resolve their internal struggles, they evolve. This evolution, or lack thereof, forms the character arc. An internal conflict worksheet can help track how a character's internal state changes over the course of a story, highlighting key moments of decision-making and emotional development.

Exploring External Conflict: Challenges from the Outside

External conflict, in contrast to internal conflict, is the struggle that a character faces with forces outside of themselves. These are the visible, tangible obstacles that a protagonist must overcome to achieve their goals. External conflicts drive the plot forward and create tension and suspense. They are the battles, the challenges, the societal pressures, and the environmental hazards that characters encounter on their journey. Understanding these external forces is key to crafting a dynamic and engaging plot.

Types of External Conflict

External conflict can be categorized into several distinct types, each presenting unique challenges for a character:

- **Character vs. Character:** This is a direct confrontation between two or more characters, often the protagonist and an antagonist.
- **Character vs. Nature:** This involves a character battling against the forces of the natural world, such as storms, wild animals, or harsh environments.
- **Character vs. Society:** Here, a character struggles against the norms, laws, or customs of the society in which they live.

- **Character vs. Technology:** This type of conflict arises when a character is at odds with technological advancements or the systems they represent.
- **Character vs. Supernatural:** This occurs when a character is pitted against supernatural forces, such as ghosts, monsters, or deities.

How External Conflict Drives the Plot

External conflicts are the engine of most plots. They create obstacles that the protagonist must navigate, forcing them to make choices, take action, and often adapt their strategies. The rising action of a story is typically built upon a series of escalating external conflicts. The resolution of these conflicts often determines the ultimate outcome of the narrative. Analyzing how these external forces are presented in a story can reveal much about the author's intentions and the story's themes.

The Antagonist as a Source of External Conflict

The antagonist is often the most significant source of external conflict for the protagonist. Whether a villain with malicious intent or a force of nature, the antagonist's goals are typically in direct opposition to the protagonist's. The dynamic between the protagonist and antagonist, and the conflicts that arise from their opposing objectives, are central to creating compelling narratives. An internal and external conflict worksheet can be used to map out the antagonist's motivations and their impact on the protagonist.

Benefits of Using an Internal and External Conflict Worksheet

Utilizing an internal and external conflict worksheet offers numerous advantages for both readers and writers. It provides a structured framework for dissecting complex narratives and understanding the foundational elements that make a story compelling. By systematically identifying and analyzing the conflicts within a text, one can gain a deeper appreciation for character motivations, plot development, and thematic resonance. This methodical approach fosters a more insightful and analytical reading experience.

Deepening Reader Comprehension

For readers, an internal and external conflict worksheet serves as a powerful tool for improving comprehension and analytical skills. It encourages a closer examination of the text, prompting readers to identify the underlying struggles that shape character actions and plot progression. This process can transform passive reading into an active engagement with the material, leading to a richer understanding of the story's intricacies.

Enhancing Writer's Craft

Writers can leverage an internal and external conflict worksheet to strengthen their own storytelling abilities. By analyzing how other authors effectively deploy conflict, aspiring writers can learn to create more dynamic characters and engaging plots. Furthermore, using a worksheet to plan their own narratives helps ensure that conflicts are well-defined, logically presented, and contribute meaningfully to the overall story arc. It's a proactive way to build a robust narrative structure.

Identifying Thematic Connections

Conflicts are often closely tied to a story's underlying themes. An internal and external conflict worksheet can help writers and readers uncover these connections. By mapping out the various struggles a character faces, it becomes easier to see how these conflicts reflect broader societal issues, philosophical questions, or universal human experiences. This allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the story's message.

How to Create Your Own Internal and External Conflict Worksheet

Creating your own internal and external conflict worksheet is a straightforward process that can significantly aid in story analysis and creation. The key is to design a template that prompts you to think critically about the different types of conflicts and their impact on the narrative. A well-structured worksheet will guide your analysis and ensure you don't overlook crucial aspects of character and plot development. The goal is to have a clear, organized way to document your findings.

Essential Components of a Conflict Worksheet

A comprehensive worksheet should include sections for:

- **Character Identification:** List the main characters and their roles.
- **Internal Conflicts:** For each character, detail their inner struggles, motivations, and dilemmas.
- **External Conflicts:** Identify the types of external conflicts each character faces (character vs. character, nature, society, etc.).
- **Conflict Drivers:** Note what initiates or exacerbates each conflict.
- **Conflict Resolution/Impact:** Describe how conflicts are resolved or how they affect the character and plot.
- **Thematic Links:** Record any potential thematic connections related to the conflicts.

Structuring Your Worksheet for Clarity

Organize your worksheet logically. You might create a table with columns for each component mentioned above, or use bullet points under specific headings for each character. The most effective structure is one that allows for easy comparison and cross-referencing of different conflicts and their interactions. A clear layout ensures that the information is readily accessible and digestible, making the analysis process more efficient.

Adapting Worksheets for Different Genres

While the core components remain similar, you may need to adapt your worksheet based on the genre you are analyzing or writing. For science fiction, you might add a category for "Character vs. Technology" or "Character vs. Alien." For historical fiction, "Character vs. Society" or "Character vs. Historical Events" might be more prominent. Customizing your template ensures it aligns with the specific demands of the genre.

Analyzing Characters Through Conflict Worksheets

Character analysis is deeply intertwined with understanding the conflicts they experience. An internal and external conflict worksheet is an excellent tool for dissecting a character's personality, motivations, and development. By systematically examining the battles a character wages, both within themselves and against external forces, we can paint a more vivid and accurate picture of who they are and why they behave the way they do. This deep dive into character through conflict is essential for creating believable and impactful personas.

Mapping a Character's Internal Struggles

When filling out the "Internal Conflicts" section of your worksheet, be specific. Instead of just writing "guilt," detail why the character feels guilty, what specific action or inaction caused it, and how this guilt affects their decisions. For instance, a character might be torn between loyalty to their family and their personal ambition, creating a rich internal conflict that drives their actions.

Tracing a Character's External Challenges

For external conflicts, document not only the type of conflict but also the specific entities or forces involved. If a character is facing "Character vs. Society," specify which societal norms or institutions are creating the obstacle. If it's "Character vs. Nature," describe the environmental threat. Understanding the nature of these external forces helps reveal the protagonist's capabilities and their vulnerabilities.

How Conflict Reveals Character Motivation

The conflicts a character chooses to engage with, and how they approach them, are direct indicators of their core motivations. A character who consistently seeks out "Character vs. Character" conflicts might be driven by a need for dominance or justice. Conversely, a character who struggles against "Character vs. Society" might be motivated by a desire for freedom or rebellion. An internal and external conflict worksheet allows you to connect these actions back to underlying character drives.

Applying Conflict Analysis to Your Own Writing

The insights gained from analyzing conflicts in other works can be directly applied to your own writing projects. Whether you're in the brainstorming phase or revising a draft, understanding how to effectively introduce and manage internal and external conflicts is paramount to crafting a compelling narrative. Using a conflict worksheet as a planning tool can preemptively address potential plot holes and ensure your character arcs are well-supported by their struggles.

Developing Your Protagonist's Core Conflict

Every protagonist should have a central internal conflict that resonates with their journey and a primary external conflict that drives the plot. Use your worksheet to define these core struggles early on. Ask yourself: What is the most significant internal battle my character must win? What is the main external obstacle they need to overcome? The clarity here will form the backbone of your story.

Creating Compelling Antagonists and Obstacles

An effective antagonist or external obstacle is one whose goals directly clash with the protagonist's, creating meaningful friction. Use your worksheet to brainstorm the antagonist's motivations and how they directly oppose the protagonist's desires. This ensures that the external conflicts are not arbitrary but integral to the story's central thematic concerns and character development.

Ensuring Conflict Escalation and Resolution

A well-structured story features escalating conflicts, meaning the stakes and challenges increase as the narrative progresses. Your worksheet can help you map out this escalation, ensuring each new conflict builds upon the last. Equally important is the resolution; consider how each conflict will be resolved and what impact that resolution will have on the character and the overall plot. Avoid abrupt or unearned resolutions.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid When Using Conflict Worksheets

While incredibly beneficial, there are certain common mistakes writers and readers can make when using an internal and external conflict worksheet. Being aware of these pitfalls can help you maximize the tool's effectiveness and avoid potential frustrations. The goal is to use the worksheet as a guide, not a rigid set of rules that stifles creativity or oversimplifies complex narratives.

Over-Reliance on Categorization

It's easy to get bogged down in rigidly categorizing every single struggle. Remember that conflicts can often overlap or exist in shades of gray. Don't let the desire for perfect classification prevent you from identifying the core essence of a character's struggle. Sometimes, a conflict might blend elements of "Character vs. Society" and "Character vs. Character," and that's perfectly acceptable.

Neglecting the Interplay Between Conflicts

Internal and external conflicts are rarely isolated. They influence and inform each other. A character's internal struggles can shape how they approach external challenges, and external pressures can exacerbate internal dilemmas. When using your worksheet, make an effort to note these connections. For example, a character's fear of failure (internal) might make them more hesitant to confront a dangerous antagonist (external).

Failing to Connect Conflict to Character Arc

The ultimate purpose of conflict in storytelling is to facilitate character development. If your analysis doesn't clearly show how the conflicts contribute to a character's growth, change, or ultimate fate, you may be missing a crucial element. Ensure that your worksheet helps you trace how overcoming or succumbing to conflict shapes the character over time.

Advanced Techniques for Conflict Exploration

Once you've mastered the basics of using an internal and external conflict worksheet, you can explore more advanced techniques to enrich your analysis and writing. These methods involve looking beyond simple identification and delving into the deeper implications of conflict within a narrative. By pushing your analysis further, you can unlock new layers of meaning and craft more sophisticated storytelling.

Exploring Sub-Conflicts and Nuances

Many characters experience not just one primary internal conflict, but

several smaller, related sub-conflicts. Similarly, external conflicts can be multifaceted. Your worksheet can be enhanced by creating space to explore these finer details. For example, within a "Character vs. Society" conflict, a character might also face specific prejudices based on their background or belief system.

Analyzing the Impact of Conflict Resolution on Theme

The way conflicts are resolved, or left unresolved, often carries significant thematic weight. Consider how the outcomes of both internal and external struggles reinforce or challenge the story's central themes. Does the character's victory in an external conflict come at a moral cost that highlights a theme about sacrifice? Does their failure to overcome an internal conflict underscore a theme about human imperfection?

Using Conflict to Foreshadow Future Events

Well-placed conflicts can also serve as powerful foreshadowing tools. An internal struggle that a character grapples with early in the story might hint at a future decision or a critical moment of character testing. Similarly, a minor external challenge could foreshadow a larger, more dangerous obstacle later on. Your worksheet can help you identify these narrative threads and their potential implications for the future of the story.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main purpose of an internal and external conflict worksheet?

The main purpose is to help readers and writers identify, analyze, and understand the different types of conflicts present in a story or piece of writing, fostering deeper comprehension and creative development.

What are the most common types of external conflict typically found on such worksheets?

The most common external conflicts are Man vs. Man, Man vs. Society, Man vs. Nature, and Man vs. Technology.

How does a worksheet help distinguish between internal and external conflict?

Worksheets usually provide definitions and examples of each, prompting users to categorize specific plot points or character struggles within those frameworks.

What are the key components of internal conflict

often explored in a worksheet?

Key components include Man vs. Self (moral dilemmas, conflicting desires, inner struggles) and sometimes Man vs. Fate or Destiny.

Why is understanding conflict important for character development?

Conflict is crucial for character development because it reveals a character's motivations, values, strengths, and weaknesses as they navigate challenges.

How can a worksheet assist in analyzing the impact of conflict on a narrative?

Worksheets often have sections that ask about the consequences of conflicts, such as how they drive the plot forward, raise the stakes, or lead to character growth.

Are there worksheets tailored for specific genres, like fantasy or science fiction?

Yes, while core concepts remain, genre-specific worksheets might include unique conflict types relevant to that genre, such as Man vs. Magic or Man vs. Supernatural Entities.

What makes a conflict 'external' versus 'internal' in the context of a worksheet?

External conflict involves a struggle against an outside force (another person, nature, society, etc.), while internal conflict is a struggle within the character's own mind or heart.

How can students use an internal and external conflict worksheet for creative writing?

Students can use it to brainstorm plot ideas, develop character arcs, and ensure their stories have a strong sense of tension and purpose by actively planning their conflicts.

What are some common pitfalls to avoid when completing a conflict worksheet?

Common pitfalls include confusing the types of conflict, not providing specific textual evidence for analysis, or failing to consider how multiple conflicts interact and influence each other.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles, each beginning with "I", related to internal and external conflict, with short descriptions:

1. *Inner Storms and Outer Gales*: This novel explores the tumultuous journey of a protagonist battling both deeply personal anxieties and societal pressures. Their internal struggles with self-doubt are mirrored by external conflicts with corrupt institutions and challenging relationships. The narrative delves into how these opposing forces shape their identity and ultimately their fate.
2. *Whispers of Doubt, Roars of War*: This historical fiction piece vividly portrays a soldier grappling with the moral ambiguities of conflict. Internally, they question the justifications for war and the cost of violence, while externally they face the brutal realities of the battlefield. The book powerfully illustrates the human toll of both personal conscience and public warfare.
3. *The Labyrinth of Self and Society*: A character navigates a complex world where their own insecurities and societal expectations create an intricate maze. Internal conflicts arise from a desire for independence clashing with the need for belonging, while external conflicts involve navigating prejudiced communities and oppressive systems. This story examines the constant negotiation between one's inner landscape and the external world.
4. *Silent Battles, Public Strife*: This collection of interconnected stories highlights individuals facing profound internal struggles that manifest in their public interactions. From repressed grief to unspoken resentments, these personal conflicts spill over into interpersonal and communal disagreements. The book showcases how the unseen battles within us can create significant external disturbances.
5. *When Worlds Collide Within*: This speculative fiction novel follows a protagonist thrust into an alien environment, forcing them to confront not only external threats but also their own prejudices and assumptions. The clash between their established beliefs and the stark reality of their new world creates intense internal turmoil. External dangers are amplified by their evolving understanding of themselves and others.
6. *The Weight of Unseen Chains*: This drama centers on a character burdened by a secret that affects every aspect of their life. Internally, they battle guilt and the fear of exposure, while externally they face the consequences of their past actions and the judgment of those around them. The story emphasizes how internal burdens can create significant external obstacles.
7. *A Shadow of Doubt, A Fire of Rebellion*: This fantasy epic features a hero who must overcome personal fear and hesitation before leading a revolution. Their internal struggle for courage is as vital as the external war against an oppressive regime. The narrative weaves together the private journey of self-discovery with the grand public struggle for freedom.
8. *The Mirror and the Mountain*: This memoir recounts the author's journey of self-acceptance while simultaneously confronting external challenges like illness and discrimination. The mirror represents the introspection needed to understand their internal conflicts, while the mountain symbolizes the formidable external obstacles they must ascend. It's a testament to resilience in the face of both inner and outer adversity.
9. *Unraveling the Threads of Conflict*: This psychological thriller delves into the mind of a detective investigating a case that eerily mirrors their own past traumas. Their internal turmoil threatens to derail the investigation, creating a dangerous feedback loop with the external mystery. The book explores how personal demons can complicate and even obstruct the

pursuit of justice.

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