

The different types of character in a story

Character roles:

Protagonist – most important person, main actor, most affected by the antagonist. Her actions and reactions drive most of the plot. Readers identify with her.

Antagonist – a character or a force. It's not necessarily a bad person or a person at all. It could be a political system, an ideology, an environmental threat like a storm or climate change etc. She's directly opposed to Protagonist's goals. She's not necessarily evil, just the opposite of the Protagonist. It's not enough for the Antagonist to simply want to obstruct the Protagonist's goals. She has her own goals and she won't care about the Protagonist until the Protagonist gets in her way. She's the hero of her own story, she believes she's right. She can have good intentions.

Sidekick – best friend, accomplice, family member etc. She's loyal to Protagonist and supports her goals. E.g. Hermione or Ron

Sceptic – The opposite of the sidekick. She doubts everything. She's mostly on Protagonist's side but is pessimistic about her choices. She's the voice of caution, sometimes to Protagonist's advantage. E.g. Miss Sally in Cars

Guardian – aka the mentor. A teacher or helper who guards the Protagonist during quest. She's a moral standard. I.e. She supports the Protagonist's goals if they're morally good goals but opposes them if they're morally bad. E.g. Obi-Wan.

Reason – the voice of logic rather than emotion. She's independent of Protagonist and influences the Protagonist for better or worse. E.g. C3P0

Emotion – opposite of reason. She's fundamentally emotional and makes decisions based on emotions rather than logic. Can be positive emotion or negative. Her emotion influences Protagonist for better or worse. E.g. Mr Ping in Kung Fu Panda.

Love interest – Protagonist falls in love with her and she usually falls in love back. Often a catalyst in the journey, supports Protagonist and acts in Protagonist's best interests.

Anti-hero – She's on the side of good but no one's sure why because she's not like the good guys. e.g. Snape or Han Solo.

Fool – Shows other characters how to be simple and happy and can be unwittingly wise. e.g. Dori in Finding Nemo.

The impact character - The catalyst who enables, empowers or forces Protagonist to change. The impact character knows the truth. Protagonist keeps running into this truth and doesn't want to face it. The impact character keeps forcing her to face it. She can be a mentor who teaches her the truth or an example who shows her it. Her central purpose is to represent the truth. She may or may not have all the truths figured out. She may be more of a mess than the Protagonist except when it comes to this particular truth. She may fulfil other roles too. She could be a collective of several characters. E.g. The Ghosts of Christmas Past/Present/Future or Boo in Monsters Inc

Negative impact character – serves the same function as the impact character (to teach Protagonist the truth) but does it by her own *bad* example of clinging to the lie and showing her where it will eventually lead. E.g. Peter Pan (by believing that you don't have to grow up, he leads Wendy to the truth that you do)

Remember:

- Your story might not have ALL these roles but it should probably have most of them.
- Characters can perform more than one of these roles at various times. E.g. Obi Wan is both a Guardian and an Impact Character. Miss Sally is a love interest and a sceptic.
- These roles can be performed temporarily depending on what's needed in the story at that point. So you could have all of these roles in a story with only a couple of characters.

Ask yourself:

What's the Protagonist and Antagonist relationship glue? They hate each other but they're locked in conflict and they can't just walk away. What are the repercussions of the Protagonist walking away from the Antagonist? There have to be some otherwise they could just walk away and there'd be no story. They must be bonded by something.

Here are 7 possible adhesives:

1. Duty or obligation – e.g. Protagonist is responsible for Antagonist's existence so has to deal with her (eg Frankenstein and the monster)
2. Hatred or vengeance – Protagonist needs Antagonist to help her get vengeance
3. Survival – it's kill or be killed
4. Love – Protagonist has complicated feelings for Antagonist
5. Enjoyment or obsession – likes the cat and mouse game, also common in romance stories, where Love Interests are also Antagonists for much of the story
6. Greed – Protagonist wants something from Antagonist
7. Pride – can't turn away from Antagonist because they're too proud

Ask yourself:

- Which of my characters is performing each role?
- Am I missing any of the character roles? If so, do I need to add a new character or get an existing character to play an extra role?
- Is there anyone who isn't playing one of these roles? If so, do I really need that character?