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engaging on 10 July 2023 5 min read What is Internal Conflict? What is External Conflict? Practical Uses of Internal Conflict Examples of Internal Conflict Practical Uses of External Conflict Examples of External Conflict How to Balance Internal and External Conflict Examples of Balanced Conflict Imagine you're reading a captivating book or watching an unfolding movie. You're drawn in by the complex characters, the riveting plot, and the way the characters face challenges. The heart of these challenges? Conflict. It's the engine that drives the story, creating tension, suspense, and intrigue. But did you know that there are two primary types of conflict in storytelling? Let's dive into the fascinating world of internal vs. external conflict. Defining Internal and External Conflict The world of storytelling is full of hurdles and challenges that our beloved characters must overcome. These hurdles come in two main types – internal conflict and external conflict. Understanding the differences between these two can add depth to your writing and reading experiences. So, let's break down what each type of conflict entails. What is Internal Conflict? Internal conflict is a struggle that happens within a character's mind. It's like a psychological tug of war. For instance, consider Hamlet from Shakespeare's famous play. Hamlet wrestles with a moral dilemma – whether to avenge his father's death or not. This is a classic example of internal conflict. What is External Conflict? External conflict, on the other hand, occurs outside of the character. This type of conflict is usually with an opposing force, such as another character, society, or nature. Think of Harry Potter's endless battles with Lord Voldemort in J.K. Rowling's iconic series – that's a prime example of external conflict. Why is Conflict So Important? Conflict is the lifeblood of a story. It's what keeps the audience hooked and invested in the characters' journey. Without conflict, a story would be flat and predictable. By creating conflict, writers can explore the depths of their characters' personalities, fears, desires, and motivations. They can also explore the complexities of the world they're building. Conflict allows writers to create compelling, relatable characters and drive narrative tension. Next, let's explore how external conflict is used in storytelling. Applying External Conflict While internal conflict is a battle within, external conflict comes from outside. It's the showdown between the hero and the villain, the clash between opposing forces, the obstacle that our protagonist needs to overcome. So how do we apply external conflict to make our stories more engaging? Practical Uses of External Conflict External conflict serves several important purposes in a narrative: Driving the Plot: It provides the main obstacle that propels the story forward. Defining the Stakes: It establishes what's at risk and why the outcome matters. Highlighting Character Traits: It reveals aspects of a character's personality under pressure. Examples of External Conflict Let's consider some examples of external conflict from popular stories: The Death Star: In "Star Wars", the Rebel Alliance's fight against the Death Star provides a clear external conflict. The Jurassic Park: In "Jurassic Park", the struggle for survival against dinosaurs is the main external conflict. The White Walkers: In "Game of Thrones", the Seven Kingdoms' battle against the White Walkers is a key external conflict that drives the plot. By effectively applying external conflict, you can create a dramatic narrative that keeps your audience hooked and invested in the story. How to Balance Internal and External Conflict Balancing internal and external conflict is like walking a tightrope. Lean too much on one side, and the story becomes either too introspective or too action-driven. Here are some tips on achieving a good balance: Intertwine the Conflicts: Make the internal conflict a reflection of the external one. For instance, a character's fear of heights (internal conflict) becomes critical when he has to scale a towering skyscraper (external conflict). Let Conflicts Evolve: As the story advances, allow the conflicts to change and grow. This keeps the narrative fresh and engaging. Use Conflict to Show Growth: Use the resolution of conflicts to show character development. Overcoming external conflict could lead to resolving internal conflict, symbolizing personal growth. Examples of Balanced Conflict Wondering how to master the balancing act between internal and external conflict? Here are some examples: Harry Potter: In J.K. Rowling's series, Harry battles Voldemort (external conflict), while also dealing with his fears and insecurities (internal conflict). The Hunger Games: Katniss Everdeen faces the deadly Hunger Games (external conflict) while struggling with her feelings and moral dilemmas (internal conflict). Toy Story: Woody fights to reclaim his place as Andy's favorite toy (external conflict) while dealing with jealousy and fear of abandonment (internal conflict). Remember, a well-crafted story skillfully balances both internal and external conflict. The result is a narrative that resonates deeply with readers. So, are you ready to create your engaging tale of internal vs. external conflict? If you're interested in diving deeper into the concepts of internal and external conflict, we highly recommend checking out the workshop titled "Instant Gratification vs. Longevity Within Your Projects" by Celina Rodriguez. This workshop will provide you with valuable insights into the differences between short-term satisfaction and long-term success within your creative projects, and how to effectively balance both to achieve your goals. How to Use External Conflict to Drive Your Story Forward: Learn from Industry-Leading Creators across Film, Fashion, Art, Photography, Design and more. Commit to your creativity! Live classes every day! Learn from industry-leading creators! Get useful feedback from experts and peers! Best deal of the year! mo** billed annually after the trial ends. /mo** Billed monthly after the trial ends. Every great story hinges on conflict. Think about it. In every compelling story—whether it be a novel, fairytale, movie, play, etc.—the plot only occurs because your individual characters have problems. The conflict is the story, the driving force moving plot forward. There are two different types of core conflict in fiction: internal and external conflicts. However, for beginning writers especially, one type of conflict often gets the brunt of the attention while the other can be overlooked or left out completely. Here's what you need to know about both types of conflict, how they contribute to your character arc, and how to make them work together for the most compelling stories possible. The difference between internal and external conflict External conflict refers to the problems happening outside of your central character: a monster, a villain, a social injustice. Internal conflict refers to the problems or conflict happening inside your character: addiction, uncertainty, fear. The most effective stories will incorporate both types of conflict to give nuance to the character development and plot. Think of external vs. internal conflict like this: External conflict is the monster waiting in the woods to frighten your protagonist. It's the villainous corporation tearing down the town park to build a mall. It's the hurricane that's approaching your character's home. Meanwhile, internal conflict is your character's secret that they can't possibly overcome the monster. It's their shame that they might actually like the idea of a new mall coming to town. It's the struggle to evacuate knowing their home might be destroyed. Depending on the particular story, either the external or internal conflict will be more important. One of them might be a secondary conflict. However, if you want to have a more powerful story, you need to make sure you have both. External conflict is the monster waiting in the woods to frighten your protagonist. It's the villainous corporation tearing down the town park to build a mall. It's the hurricane that's approaching your character's home. Meanwhile, internal conflict is your character's secret that they can't possibly overcome the monster. It's their shame that they might actually like the idea of a new mall coming to town. It's the struggle to evacuate knowing their home might be destroyed. Depending on the particular story, either the external or internal conflict will be more important. 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