

Exercise walk-through

The function of contrasting characters ■ 4.2

eXercise

You must be able to

- define protagonist and antagonist
- name the four things an antagonist may be
- state what protagonists and antagonists may represent
- explain why an antagonist need not be a villain

Method — Definitions

The main character in a narrative is the protagonist; the antagonist opposes the protagonist — a functional definition, about opposition, not about morality.

Method — Four possibilities

The antagonist **may be another character, the internal conflicts of the protagonist, a collective (such as society), or nature.**

Method — What they represent

Protagonists and antagonists may represent contrasting values. The opposition is often between what each holds important, not merely between two people.

Method — Not a villain

If the antagonist can be society or nature or the protagonist's own conflicts, then 'villain' is the wrong word. An answer calling every antagonist evil has substituted a moral category for a structural one.

Practice 2.1 ■ 2 marks

Define protagonist and antagonist.

Solution 2.1

Worked steps

the protagonist is the main character **B1**; the antagonist opposes the protagonist **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 2 marks

Name the four things an antagonist may be.

Solution 2.2

Method: Four possibilities

Worked steps

another character; the internal conflicts of the protagonist; a collective such as society; nature **B2**.

Practice 2.3 ■ 2 marks

An antagonist need not be a villain.

- (a) Explain why.
- (b) State what the two may represent.

Solution 2.3

Method: Not a villain

Worked steps

(a) the definition is about opposition rather than morality **B1**, and society, nature or the protagonist's own conflicts cannot be villains **B1**. (b) contrasting values **B1**.

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 1 mark

The antagonist may be another character, a collective, nature, or

A the protagonist's internal conflicts

B the narrator only

C the author

D the reader

Solution 3.1

Method: Four possibilities

A the protagonist's internal conflicts



B the narrator only

C the author

D the reader

Worked steps

A. internal conflicts count.

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 1 mark

The definition of antagonist is

- A** moral
- B** functional
- C** biographical
- D** historical

Solution 3.2

Method: Definitions

A moral

B functional 

C biographical

D historical

Worked steps

B. functional.

Exam-style 3.3 ■ 1 mark

A story's antagonist is a drought.

- (a) State which of the four possibilities this is.
- (b) Explain what values the opposition might represent.

Solution 3.3

Worked steps

(a) nature **B1**. (b) any defensible pair, e.g. human planning against indifference **B1**, which the drought embodies by being unresponsive to any argument **B1**.