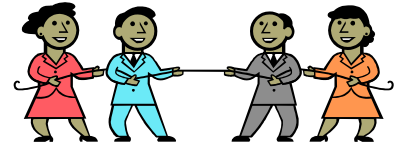# CONFLICT IN LITERATURE:

In literature, conflict is the central issue and makes the story move. Short stories have one conflict, while novels have many. Literary conflict includes internal conflict, also called man versus self-conflict, and external conflict which includes man versus man, man versus nature, man versus society and man versus fate. The way conflict is used and how the conflicts are resolved are all determined by the type of story being told.

Internal Conflict

Man vs. Self: Internal conflict is that which exists inside the character. Struggles with morality, fate, desire and belief, to name a few. This form of conflict is central to the character, or characters and must be resolved by the character alone. Every good character suffers from the weight of internal conflict, it lends them an air of complex believability. Internal conflict is also known as man versus self.   Internal conflict is necessary for good characters, but it's the least complicated form of conflict.

External Conflict

Unlike internal conflict, external conflict deals with the problems of the world. The story's characters will struggle against the circumstances of external conflict, they may even suffer internal conflict resulting from the issues of external conflict, but this is not as simple as internal conflict. External conflict occurs when characters are involved in the world's woes, such issues as community, nature, government and other characters are all examples of external conflict. External conflict manifests itself as man versus man, man versus nature, man versus society and man versus fate.

Man vs. Man: Man versus man is the most fundamental type of external conflict. This form of external conflict occurs when a character struggles against another character. These struggles may be born from moral, religious or social differences and may be emotional, verbal or physical conflicts. Man versus man is almost always the conflict present when a hero fights a villain. This form of conflict may present alone, or in conjunction with other external conflicts. Star War's is an excellent example, where Luke Skywalker's fight with Darth Vader is a man versus man conflict that also treads into the realm of man versus fate.

Man vs. Nature: Man versus nature conflicts occur when a character, or characters, find themselves at odds with forces of nature. A character struck by lightning, characters whose boat sinks in a storm and a character who struggles against hypothermia in a snow storm are all characters experiencing man versus nature conflicts.

Man vs. Society: This external conflict exists when characters struggle against the morays of their culture and government. Works where character's battle evil, oppressive cultures are characteristic of man versus society conflict. One example of man versus society is Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 a novel about a fireman who, though it's his job to burn books, secretly collects them.

Man vs. Fate: Man versus fate occurs when a character is compelled to follow an unknown destiny. Man versus fate conflict breeds internal conflict, while forcing a character to consciously, or subconsciously, act on his or her fate. The Star Wars example persists here because while Luke Skywalker chases his man versus man conflict, he is also propelled into the life of a Jedi as his destiny, a destiny he is powerless to resist.

While conflict in literature can be complex, knowing the basics is key to understanding how to conflict is built and how it affects the story. These elements of conflict can appear both individually and together with one another, but one of them must exist for the story to exist.

Some modern theory adds the following additional types of conflict in literature:

Character vs. God, or the Supernatural: This could be any supernatural force that is outside the understanding of the protagonist, including monsters, aliens, or deities. Examples include the film The Exorcist, Alien, The Seventh Seal, or Final Destination.

Character vs. Machine/Technology: places a character against man-made entities which may possess "artificial intelligence". The films Metropolis and Blade Runner are good examples of this conflict.