

4.2 The function of contrasting characters

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 12 marks**

KEY WORDS antagonist 对立者 • protagonist 主人公 • protagonist and antagonist 主角与对手

Objective

Build the skills to explain **protagonist and antagonist** 主角与对手.

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

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Definitions

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

■ Four possibilities

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

■ What they represent

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

■ 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.

2 Practice

2.1 Define protagonist and antagonist. [2]

2.2 Name the four things an antagonist may be. [2]

2.3 An antagonist need not be a villain.

(a) Explain why. [2]

(b) State what the two may represent. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 The antagonist may be another character, a collective, nature, or [1]

- **A** the protagonist's internal conflicts
- **B** the narrator only
- **C** the author
- **D** the reader

3.2 The definition of antagonist is [1]

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

3.3 A story's antagonist is a drought.

(a) State which of the four possibilities this is.

[1]

(b) Explain what values the opposition might represent.

[2]

Solutions

2.1 the protagonist is the main character; the antagonist opposes the protagonist.

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

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

3.1 A. internal conflicts count.

3.2 B. functional.

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