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## What is a literary foil

In literature, a foil is a character that has characteristics that oppose another character, usually the protagonist. The foil character may be completely opposite to the protagonist, or very similar with one key difference. The foil character is used to highlight some particular quality or qualities of the main character.A subplot can also work as a foil to the main plot. The foil subplot highlights some key aspects of the main plot by showing an opposing situation.Difference Between Foil and AntagonistA foil is not necessarily an antagonist. An antagonist is a character who works in opposition to the protagonist. The antagonist is in direct conflict with the protagonist and presents obstacles to the protagonist achieving his or her goal. The foil, on the other hand, is not necessarily working in opposition to the protagonist. As the foil definition suggests, a foil is simply a person that has qualities that differ from the qualities of the protagonist. The protagonist and foil may even be working together, such as Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. The key difference, then, between the foil and antagonist is that the antagonist's actions oppose the protagonist while the foil's character is in opposition to the protagonist.Common Examples of FoilIn general, a foil is only a term that refers to characters in literature. However, sometimes it is possible to think of people in our own lives who seem to have opposite characteristics as us, and who play an opposite role. There is also the familiar concept of "good cop/bad cop" that plays out in real life, sometimes between parents, in a business meeting, or amongst friends when giving advice.Significance of Foil in LiteratureThere are examples of foil characters in a large number of works of drama. Authors may use foil characters to show either the inner strengths or weaknesses of their protagonists. Foil characters may also make an opposite choice as the protagonist, which is a way for the author to explore what would have happened if the protagonist had gone down a different path.The term "foil" came into its current usage as a literary device from the concept of putting tin foil behind a gemstone to make it look more brilliant. The foil character works in the same way—to make the protagonist seem more incredible, or, adversely, to make his or her faults more obvious.Examples of Foil in LiteratureExample 1: Romeo and MercutioMERCUTIO: Romeo, Humors! Madman! Passion! Lover!Appear thou in the likeness of a sigh,Speak but one rhyme and I am satisfied.Cry but "Ay me!" Pronounce but "love" and "dove."(Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare)This is an example of foil in which the two characters are good friends, yet have one very important difference. Romeo is a romantic person, hopelessly romantic in Mercutio's opinion. Mercutio, on the other hand, is witty and not at all romantic; he views love as a physical pursuit rather than an emotional one. He continuously mocks Romeo's devotion to different women and the idealized version Romeo has of love. As a foil character, Mercutio provides some comic relief to Romeo's all-consuming passion, as well as a touch of skepticism and reality.Example 2: Heathcliff and Edgar Linton...having knocked gently, young Linton entered, his face brilliant with delight at the unexpected summons she had received. Doubtless Catherine marked the difference between her friends, as one came in and the other went out. The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley, and his voice and greeting were as opposite as his aspect. He had a sweet, low manner of speaking, and pronounced his words as you do: that's less gruff than we talk here, and softer.(Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë)This is a foil example in which neither character is the protagonist, yet the two male suitors of the protagonist Catherine couldn't be more different. Heathcliff is dark and ill-natured; as Brontë writes, "he acquired a slouching gait and ignoble look." Linton, on the other hand, is fair-skinned and fair-haired, and treats Catherine with kindness. Catherine has difficulty deciding if she wants to be with Heathcliff or with Linton; they represent her two competing desires. Symbolically, the two men are buried on either side of Catherine.Example 3: Tom Buchanan and Jay GatsbyTom BuchananHe was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward.Jay GatsbyHe smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life.(The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald)The above descriptions of the two men come from the narrator Nick Carraway. It is clear, upon these first impressions, that Nick feels very differently about Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. The two men are foil for many reasons; they are both love Daisy, Tom's wife, and they live in the opposing East Egg and West Egg. They are both extremely wealthy, but came upon their wealth differently (Tom was born with it, while Gatsby is a self-made man). Also, from these two descriptions it is obvious that Gatsby inspires confidence, while Tom does not.Example 4: Caleb and AronCal was growing up dark-skinned, dark-haired. He was quick and sure and secret.Aron drew love from every side. He seemed shy and delicate. His pink-and-white skin, golden hair, and wide-set blue eyes caught attention.And what was charming in the blond ingenuousness of Aron became suspicious and unpleasant in the dark-faced, slit-eyed Cal.(East of Eden by John Steinbeck)John Steinbeck modeled his novel East of Eden after the story of Adam and Eve and their sons Cain and Abel. The two sons of Adam Trask are Cal and Aron, and they mimic the differences between the two Biblical sons. Cal, the representative of the murderous Cain, is described as dark and secret. Aron, on the other hand, the literary descendent of the pastoral Abel, is pale, beloved, and delicate. The two boys could not be more different, and their differences affect the choices they make throughout the novel.Example 5: Snowball and NapoleonPre-eminent among the pigs were two young boars named Snowball and Napoleon, whom Mr. Jones was breeding up for sale. Napoleon was a large, rather fierce-looking Berkshire boar, the only Berkshire on the farm, not much of a talker, but with a reputation for getting his own way. Snowball was a more vivacious pig than Napoleon, quicker in speech and more inventive, but was not considered to have the same depth of character.(Animal Farm by George Orwell)In George Orwell's novel Animal Farm, the two pigs Napoleon and Snowball start off on the same side, which is to say, working for animal rights. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Napoleon's ambitions are different than those of Snowball. It turns out that Napoleon is not, in fact, working for the rights of all animals, but instead for the primacy of the pigs on the farm over the rest of the animals. He eventually runs Snowball off the farm. The different ways in which the two pigs act are foreshadowed in this early description of their physical differences. This is a case in which the two characters choose very different paths after starting from the same point. The pigs are meant to represent the historical figures of Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky.Test Your Knowledge of Foil1. Which of the following statements is the best definition of foil as a literary device? A. A character that works in opposition to the protagonist.B. A character that has opposing characteristics as the protagonist.C. An evil character that has bad intentions.Answer to Question #1ShowAnswer: B is the correct answer.2. Which of the following statements is true?A. The foil is always a villain.B. The foil is always a character.C. The foil is never the protagonist.Answer to Question #2ShowAnswer: C is the correct answer. The foil character is not necessarily a villain or antagonist, and there can be foil subplots. However, the term "foil" is never used for at the main character; instead, a foil acts to highlight specific characteristics in the main character.3. True or False: there can only be one foil in a work of literature.A. TrueB. FalseAnswer to Question #3ShowAnswer: B (False) is the correct answer. There may be many examples of foil pairs in a work of literature, and a protagonist may have more than one foil.report this ad A foil character can be a nifty device that helps to develop your story's characters. By contrasting two characters' personalities, it helps your audience to understand what makes them tick - and also to see how important their roles are in the story. Smart, right? Storyboarding and animatics for modern video teams. Get organized, produce your best work. Fun fact: the literary term 'foil' comes from the old practice of backing gems with foil to make them shine more brightly. In this post, we'll check out some examples of foil characters from the real world. Get the Ultimate PDF Storyboard Template Bundle 10 professionally designed storyboard templates as ready-to-use PDFs. Frankenstein Mary Shelley's famous work of literature features two main characters - Dr. Frankenstein and his 'creature' - who act as classic literary foils for each other. Victor Frankenstein withdraws from the world, obsessed with his need to make a living being. In the process, he creates his own foil: a creature that craves company and connection - the exact things that Frankenstein doesn't have. The Great Gatsby In another vintage work of literature, F. Scott Fitzgerald uses narrator Nick Carraway as a foil to the novel's protagonist, Jay Gatsby, and Jay's antagonist, Tom Buchanan. The men share a desire for Tom's wife, Daisy - but in other ways they're completely different. Nick paints Tom as an entitled Ivy League-educated sportsman who inherited his money. By contrast, Nick's much more comfortable around rags-to-riches Jay - the Great Gatsby himself - describing him as a man who "had one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it..." How sweet. Hamlet In Hamlet, William Shakespeare creates a foil between Laertes and Prince Hamlet to show how different they are. At one point, Prince Hamlet tells Laertes that he'll fence with him and - to ram the point home - says, "I'll be your foil, Laertes." Shakespeare continues the foil-arama by making another foil for Hamlet: the Norwegian soldier of few words, Fortinbras. Both men have lost their fathers and want revenge. However, unlike Hamlet, Fortinbras has a strong relationship with the rest of his family - something that Claudius uses to avoid war. Harry Potter Harry Potter's rival Draco Malfoy makes an excellent foil example in the Harry Potter series. Uber-creepy Professor Snape allows both boys to "to experience the essential adventures of self-determination." But while Harry chooses to fight Lord Voldemort and the Death Eaters, Draco Malfoy instead joins them. As we see Malfoy teaming up Voldemort and his band of nasties, it helps to highlight the positive choices that Harry Potter makes as he struggles against the dark wizard. Like foil, Malfoy helps Potter to shine. Julius Caesar Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar sees our pal Will showing off his mastery of literary devices. In the play, the character Brutus has not one, but two character foils: Cassius and Mark Antony. While both Brutus and Cassius conspire to kill Caesar, Cassius is more likely to employ tricks and lean on ambition. Brutus, however, is motivated by his allegiance to the state. With the foil character of Antony, we see how his ambition, deception, and treachery differ to the honesty and naiveté of Brutus. Macbeth Shakey-P is at it again. This time, we see Banquo serving as a foil for Macbeth. Macbeth's predicted to be king, while Banquo's predicted to spawn many kings - which means his heirs will become kings. Macbeth, blinded by ambition, murders his way to the crown, then continues his bloodbath to stay seated on the throne. Banquo wants to have his heirs rule Scotland but - unlike Macbeth - doesn't set out on a killing spree to make it happen. In the process, he makes Macbeth look pretty nasty. Romeo and Juliet Retaining his title as King of the Foil, it's William Shakespeare. In his hit play Romeo and Juliet, he throws Romeo's BFF Mercutio into the mix as a spicy foil for Romeo himself. Mercutio is a character that likes to poke fun at love. Instead, Mercutio's more of a rational mind that loves logic and generally being sensible. Which sets this total square up in opposition to the lovestruck Romeo, highlighting just how romantic he is. Sherlock Holmes In another case of positioning best friends as foils, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle uses Sherlock Holmes' loyal sidekick Dr. John Watson as a secondary character to draw even more attention to the world's finest detective. As Sherlock Holmes explains his thinking about mind-bending cases to Watson, it helps the reader (or viewer) get a sense of what's going on - highlighting Holmes' unparalleled genius. Wuthering Heights Most foil definitions usually talk about foil characters. But Emily Brontë tears up the rulebook in Wuthering Heights, using an object as a foil rather than a character. Wild! Wuthering Heights is a grey, depressing, dilapidated estate. Its neighbouring estate Thrushcross Grange is, by contrast, a sophisticated, resplendent property that basks in sunshine. Using it as a foil emphasises the darkness that hangs over Wuthering Heights. Storytellers foil over themselves to use Boords Boords is the storyboarding app for creative professionals. Simplify your pre-production process with storyboards, scripts, and animatics - then gather feedback - all in one place. Creating storyboards - and foil characters - has never been simpler.



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