Understanding Protagonists and Antagonists

Tips and Objectives:
Discuss what makes characters sympathetic/likeable or despised. Students should know that looks alone are not enough to determine a character’s status as a hero or villain. However, many authors use appearance and even names to give readers hints about the personalities of their characters. Students should also realize that realistic characters are well-rounded and are only rarely “all good” or “all bad.”

This PDF file contains two worksheets that can be printed out:

1. Protagonists and Antagonists - Helps students understand the meaning of each term
2. Character Map - Helps students understand fictional characters in more depth

Character Mapping – Suggested Activities

1. Print out and distribute the Character Map.
2. Ask students to fill out the form by focusing on just one character appearing in a book the class is currently reading together.
3. If the class is not currently reading a book together, ask students to choose a character from a book they are currently reading on their own.
4. Ask students to complete character maps for all works of fiction read during the school year (choosing just one or two characters each time).
5. Encourage the students to use the character map form to help create imaginary characters as well.
6. Students can use their maps to aid them as they add more depth to the characters they write about in their own stories.
Protagonists and Antagonists

Good literature contains conflicts that must be resolved. Traditionally, these conflicts fall into four main categories as listed below. Can you think of more examples to fit each category?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Man versus Man</th>
<th>2. Man versus Society</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example 1: Shy student must confront bully</td>
<td>Example 1: A minority must fight discrimination in a racist society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 2: ________________________</td>
<td>Example 2: ________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example 3: ________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example 1: Child is abandoned in the woods and must fend for himself</td>
<td>Example 1: Teen fights the urge to commit sins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 2: ________________________</td>
<td>Example 2: ________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example 3: ________________________</td>
<td>Example 3: ________________________</td>
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</table>

In each example above, decide if there is a "hero" and a "villain." Circle the heroes.

What are the main characteristics of a hero? ________________________________

Does a hero have a certain look? ________________________________

What are the main characteristics of a villain? ________________________________

Does a villain have a certain look? ________________________________

Use the dictionary to find the meanings of the following words:

1. Protagonist: ________________________________

2. Antagonist: ________________________________

Are protagonists and antagonists usually heroes or villains? ________________________________

Can heroes have weaknesses? Can villains have positive qualities? Discuss on the back of this sheet.
Character Map

Name of Character: ______________________  Meaning of Name: ______________________

Circle the words that apply to your character:  main – minor – protagonist – antagonist

Provide a physical description of your character in writing:

Draw a picture of your character:

1. Gender and age: _________________

2. Hair color, length, and type:

3. Eye color: _________________

4. Height and build: _______________

5. Distinguishing physical features:

6. Ethnicity/Culture: _______________

Information about your character:

1. Write down five adjectives to describe your character's personality:

2. Do people like your character? Why or why not? _________________________________

3. What are your character's beliefs? _________________________________

4. What are your character's hobbies? _________________________________

5. Describe your character's family and friends: _________________________________

6. Where does your character live/work/go to school? _________________________________

7. What are your character's strengths and weaknesses? _________________________________

8. On the back of this paper, write a diary entry in your character's voice.