The girl woke up. She brushed her teeth and got dressed. Then she headed off to school. After school, she came home. She ate her supper and did her homework. At 9 o’clock she went to bed. The end.

How do you feel about the above story? Think of some adjectives you would use to describe it. Would you say that it’s:

- exciting and unpredictable?
- pointless and boring?
- funny and filled with plot twists?

One of the main problems with the above story is that it is missing a key element that every story needs in order to be interesting and engaging. Is this key element:

- A plot?
  No, the story has a plot because it is a telling of events. It describes what a girl did during her day.

- A character?
  No, although we know next to nothing about the character and she is flat and static, she is in the story.

- Some sort of conflict?
  Yes, the conflict is what is missing!

A conflict refers to the problem or difficulty that arises during the story to affect the protagonist(s). Without some sort of conflict, a story can end up like the one above and it’s likely no one will want to read it.

Usually, a novel or short story will have one main conflict that plagues the protagonist(s) during the entire plot. However, most works of fiction have many other lesser conflicts as well. There are four types of conflict:
Conflict is the key!

1. **Man/woman versus man/woman**
   This is one of the most common types of conflict. Very often with this type of conflict, the man/woman pitted against the protagonist(s) is the antagonist(s). For example: Harry Potter v Lord Voldemort.

2. **Man/woman versus society**
   In this type of conflict, the protagonist(s) finds him/herself battling against society or part of society that he/she belongs to. This is particularly common in dystopian novels such as *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Anthem* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. You could also find this kind of conflict in a story where the protagonist does not conform to the society’s norm. For example, in the short story ‘On the Sidewalk Bleeding’, Andy is a gang member and is judged harshly by society because of this.

3. **Man/woman versus nature**
   This type of conflict involves any force of nature that comes the protagonist’s way, be it animals, storms, rough terrain or the ocean. *Moby Dick* and *Jaws* are prime examples of this type of conflict and reality shows like *Survivor* and *I’m a Celebrity, Get me Out of Here!* are based on it.

4. **Man/woman versus himself**
   This conflict is also very common in works of fiction. It is rare to find a protagonist that does not have some sort of inner struggle. In fact, all of the above examples probably include this sort of conflict. Often, you will see this conflict arising from the main conflict. For example, in all of the Harry Potter books, Harry has some sort of inner struggle. Usually, it is because he feels as if he is putting his friends in danger because of his main conflict with Lord Voldemort.
Task 1

Think of some memorable novels and short stories that you have read and try to identify the type(s) of conflict within each one. Explain how this conflict exists. You may find that each work of fiction contains one or more conflicts.

1. Man/woman versus man/woman

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2. Man/woman versus society

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3. Man/woman versus nature

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4. Man/woman versus himself

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Task 2

Now that you know what’s missing in the example story above, re-write it adding in one of the above types of conflict. If you’re feeling ambitious, strengthen it by adding more details about the character and the setting.

Happy writing!