

Figure 5.4: Exploring Archetypal Characters

Main Archetypes

Hero: Predominantly exhibits goodness and works against evil to restore harmony and justice to society

Mother: Guides and directs children; offers spiritual and emotional nourishment

Evil stepmother: Treats children unfairly; spiteful and jealous

The good wife: Devoted to and unquestionably supportive of her husband

Victim: The underdog, hurt by the villain; often takes the blame for everything bad that happens

Villain: Main function is to oppose the hero or who the hero must destroy to bring justice

Practice

Sample: Archetype—the good wife. Appears in “Lamb to the Slaughter” by storyteller and author Roald Dahl (1953; <https://bit.ly/1lj7TVK>).

Questions to consider:

How does the wife fit the archetype of the good wife?

How does she break this archetypal mold?

How does this add to the complexity of the character?

How does this make the story more compelling for the reader?

How is the analysis of this character significant in the world beyond the story?

Application

Directions: Can you think of a person or a character from a fictional story, book, movie, television series, or in real life (media, popular culture, politics) that fits into one of the archetypal definitions? Check if your idea works by testing it with the same questions as in our practice example.

Questions to consider:

How does this person or character fit the archetypal model?

How does she or he break this archetypal mold?

How does this add to the complexity of the person or character?

Transfer: Archetype Writing Opportunity

Directions: Write an analytical response one-and-a-half to three pages long. Demonstrate your understanding of archetypal models. Determine what you want your reader to do, think, or feel as a result of your writing.

Questions to consider:

How does the person or character represent this archetype?

How is this person or character complex and resist the constraints of this archetypal definition?

What is the significance of the character’s nuances and complexities, and how do these impact the character, plot, or theme? (If it’s a real-life example, what are the circumstances surrounding the person?)

Why is this person or character worth consideration?

Role: Student writer seeking academic inquiry

Purpose: Share insights about the importance of understanding archetypes.

Audience: Teacher and academic community

Source: Adapted from Berit Gordon, literacy consultant, 2019.

Dahl, R. (1953). Lamb to the slaughter. Harper’s Magazine, pp. 39 -44. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/1lj7TVK> on September 23, 2019.