

4

Lesson Four

FOCUS: Characters

The main character in a work of literature is called the “protagonist.” The protagonist usually overcomes a weakness to achieve a new understanding by the work’s end. A protagonist who acts with great courage and strength may be called a “hero.” The protagonist’s journey is made more dramatic by challenges presented by characters with different beliefs or perspectives. A “foil” provokes or challenges the protagonist in profound ways. The most important foil, the “antagonist,” opposes the protagonist, barring or complicating his or her fulfillment.

Discussion Activities

Who is the protagonist in the novel? Who is the antagonist? How does their opposition to one another help develop the drama and the unfolding of the tale?

Divide the class into groups to examine the role of “foils” in the novel. Assign each group two secondary characters: Calpurnia, Boo Radley, Tom Robinson, Miss Maudie, Aunt Alexandra, Uncle Jack, Francis, or Miss Caroline. Ask students to review the first 99 pages of the novel. Have each group list key attributes of their character. Prepare a presentation that documents moments when these characters bring out reactions from Scout. How do their unique personalities help Scout learn about herself?

Writing Exercise

Write two pages on the character that you believe to be the antagonist. If Scout is our protagonist, why is this character opposed to her? How is this character forcing her to look at herself in profound ways? What passages from the text support your conclusions?

Homework

Read Chapter 12 (pp. 99-126). Find the three most vivid descriptions in Chapter 12. Are they effective? Why or why not? What do Jem and Scout learn from Mrs. Dubose and going to church with Calpurnia in this section?