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The ‘Individual vs System’ theme has been used time and again in film after film creating something of a small genre of itself. It is encouraging to see one person or a small group standing up against an all-powerful system even if the end result may be either triumphant or disastrous. It is the perfect technique to make us root for our main characters as they rebel and face difficulties so insurmountable that we immediately get sucked into their journey. If the journey ends in a success, then its perhaps the most cathartic experience ever. Conversely, it becomes all the more devastating if our characters crumble in front of the system, their efforts wasted and hopes crushed. These films even manage to infuse a feeling of inspiration in the viewer. After all, rarely someone will stand up amongst a crowd of bowed heads and raise their voice against the so called ‘master’. So without further delay let us get into the list. (SPOILER ALERT for all the films on the list) 10. High Noon (1952) The Individual: Marshall Will Kane, the sheriff of Hadleyville. The System: Most of the townspeople and even the deputies. Also Frank Miller and his gang of outlaws. The Clash: One system is surprisingly the people of the town. However, they don’t rally against the sheriff. Rather they refuse to extend their support to him in protecting their own town. Both the lodge and bar owner are more concerned about their business. Frank had friends in both places which made his presence profitable for them. Hence they are bitter about the sheriff removing Frank from the town. In a scene both the bar owner and the sheriff get into a small fight after the latter overhears him making fun of the sheriff’s decision to face Frank. Then there are the other deputies who initially might have given their word to support him but later backed out for they were worried about the reputation of the town. Even Herb, who voluntarily wanted to help, left the sheriff at the last moment out of fear. It was literally just one man against a group of four which necessarily is not a ‘system’ but are equally formidable. After the shootout, the sheriff is victorious but not without taking a bullet to his arm. However, this is a victory he is not proud of as the town for which he had done so much betrayed him and left him alone at the crucial moment. This is brilliantly signified when he takes off his gold star badge and with a disappointed look on his face throws it to the ground in front of all the people as they gathered around the dead body of Frank Miller. 9. The Lives Of Others (2006) The Individual: Writers like Georg Dreyman and Paul Hauser who use the artistic medium to criticize the GDR of the 1980s. But most importantly its Captain Gerd Wiesler of the Stasi who becomes a significant ‘individual’ The System: The Stasi who governed East Germany before the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Their main motive – ‘To know everything about everyone’. The Clash: Like most films with the said theme, The Lives Of Others too has the Stasi, a totalitarian and authoritative government which aimed at acquiring complete information about every citizen of the state. This includes spying on people without their consent and employing inhuman techniques of mental torture on suspects. Yes, there are a group of forward thinking writers who dare to raise their voice against the oppressors. The entire film could have focused on that and specifically on Georg Dreyman. Instead what we do focus on is a Stasi captain. No one would believe that a Stasi member so precise, so determined and so unflinchingly efficient in his work could have had a change of heart and turn against his own organization. Surprisingly this drastic change is brought during the process of spying on Dreyman. He gets to know intimate details about Dreyman’s life and his artistic voice. This hardened man who once despised the open minded thoughts of artists was now moved while reading a book and listening to some profound music, all from Dreyman’s home. His loneliness is contrasted with the intimate relationship of Dreyman and his girlfriend actress Christa Maria signifying Wiesler’s longing for some kind of personal human contact. Even after possessing clear evidence about Dreyman’s conspiracy, he doesn’t inform the authorities. In a way through the course of the film while the writers use art to fight against the government, Wiesler silently makes sure that they do it without facing any obstacles. 8. Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (2018) The Individual: The grief-stricken mother of Angela Hayes, Mildred Hayes played by Francis McDormand. The System: The police department of Ebbing. The chief characters include Chief Willoughby played by Woody Harrelson and Officer Dixon played by Sam Rockwell. The Clash: The film hinges on Mildred Hayes’ calling out of the police department through the use of three in-your-face billboards. Her dissatisfaction stems from their inefficiency in solving the case of her daughter and wasting time in unnecessarily troubling minorities mainly black folks of the town. By doing so she obviously alienates the police especially Dixon but also a majority of the townspeople. Even her son Robbie initially resents her. In the scene with the dentist, his behaviour is a summation of the feelings of the entire town towards her. Mildred has more and more people mounting against her and yet she doesn’t budge even after when someone burns the billboards. Interestingly, the film imbues her character with a sense of hypocrisy where on one side she criticizes the treatment of minorities by the police while on the other she clearly does not treat James well even when he extends his support. The film explores racism and hatred through Dixon’s character who comes to realize the repercussions of his violent behaviour like his assaulting of an innocent Red Welby. Mildred’s efforts don’t go in vain as this causes Dixon to aid her by the end of the film. 7. Paths Of Glory (1957) The Individual: Colonel Dax of the 701st Regiment who volunteers to defend the three men accused of cowardice. The System: The high ranking French officers namely General Georges Broulard and General Mireau along-with his few minions. The Clash: In this case, there is no all-powerful system that Colonel Dax cannot even touch or reason with. Rather just two high ranking army officials that command entire regiments. The quote ‘Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel’ is referred to by Colonel Dax after he objects to General Mireau’s strategy. The latter believes that one’s love for their country can easily make the impossible, possible. Later when the accused men are tried before the court, the prosecutor remarks that by showing cowardice, they have ‘stained the flag of France’. Funnily, these big talks about patriotism are just a farce to hide the General’s greed for a promotion and his desire to prove his fellow army officers of his superiority. In his attempts to counter the charges on the three men, Dax’s every argument is dismissed by the court. Consequently, the three are sentenced to death. Dax even tries to blackmail General Broulard after he finds out that Mireau had ordered artillery attack on his own men in the trenches. It is a reproachable action which deserves severe consequences. Yet these people in power stay untouched. So when Dax says that he is ashamed to be a soldier of this country, his words ring loudly in your ears. The absurdity of the attack is crystal clear and even more is the hypocrisy of the officials. But even after loud speeches backed with convincing points, the general ignores it all. The three are served injustice and they die at the hands of the firing squad. The anti-war tone and its criticism of the army was something extraordinary for a Hollywood film which used to glorify wars before that. The bleak reality of war is a perfect antithesis to the mainstream war films of that time. 6. One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest (1975) The Individual: Randall McMurphy played by Jack Nicholson in arguably his career best role. The System: The mental hospital comprising of doctors, nurses and helpers. But it’s the rigid Nurse Ratched who almost takes the personality of an antagonist to McMurphy’s story. The Clash: The story is about challenging authority. McMurphy is someone who has lived his life by his rules, not accustomed to rules set by any other human being. So when he is denied viewing of the World Series, naturally this becomes an intrusion into his freedom. The other patients remain controlled or even scared, like Billy, under the influence of Nurse Ratched. But looking at McMurphy fight for basic human needs of joy and fulfillment, stirs up feelings of confidence in them. Naturally the hospital authorities are the best judge for the patients’ welfare. But what’s off in Nurse Ratched’s therapeutic talking session or in her rigid rules is that it either denies them of enjoying their lives or they weaken emotionally under her commanding presence something that she very much wants. This is evident when she blackmails Billy as she is aware of his sensitive corners. Don’t mental patients deserve to live their lives to the fullest rather than being stuck in a traditional routine? Food for thought. But what’s devastating is that even with his rebelliousness, McMurphy faces defeat after they mentally restrict his freedom through lobotomy. Even in such dire circumstances the film finds hope as we see the Chief escape the confines to an unknown freedom. Subscribe via Email or RSS Feed Sort byList orderList orderAlphabeticalIMDb ratingPopularityNumber of ratingsRelease dateRuntimeDate addedYou have no recently viewed pages Conflict in cinema and storytelling is typically seen in four main types: conflict with one’s self, with others, with the supernatural, with the environment, and often the most complex of the four is a conflict with society.In this guide, we’ll dive deeper into conflicts with society seen in movies with our picks for the 10 best examples of person vs. society. From classics like One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest to beloved animated films like Shrek, we’ve put together a variety of unique movies where the main characters struggle against the world around them.Questions We’ll Answer About Person Vs. Society Conflict In Movies:What Are The 10 Best Examples Of Person Vs. Society Conflict In Film?Note: These films were selected for the ten best portrayals of different types of person vs. society conflict – not the 10 best movies overall! To showcase a substantial depth of person vs. societal conflicts, we wanted to demonstrate all the unique ways to see this conflict come together.10 Best Examples Of Person Vs. Society Conflict In FilmV FOR VENDETTAThere’s no better way to start this list than with V for Vendetta, one of the most famous examples of person vs. societal conflict.This dystopian political drama follows the story of a man called “V,” who, in a fascist and authoritarian regime in the UK, is an anarchist freedom fighter who attempts to stage a revolution against the totalitarian government in Britain.V strives to upend the government and turn society on its head – for better or for worse for many of the characters.The film’s premise is built around person vs. society conflict as V is trying to change everything about the society around him and is quite literally the opposite of what this fictional society expects of a person.SHREKYou might be surprised to find a children’s movie like Shrek on this list, but Sherk certainly has character vs. society conflicts and its core.Shrek is an outcast. A frank, anti-social ogre who refuses to fit into the mold of what this fairytale society wants its citizens to be.Shrek embraces himself for who he is and listens to no one to change his habits, no matter how outrageous or off-putting.Character vs. Society is portrayed differently in this film as Shrek doesn’t care how different he is from everyone else – he embraces and owns his ogre-ness.PLEASANTVILLEIn an unexplainable event, two siblings are zapped into their television and transported to Pleasantville, a wholesome, seemingly perfect town that’s entirely black-and-white.Not too long after arriving in the perfect town of Pleasantville, the siblings learn this black-and-white town is home to repressed people blocked from the rest of the world.Rather than conforming and continuing to stay in character to fit in with the citizens of Pleasantville, they decide to show their “true colors” and help introduce the town to what the rest of the “color” or real world has to offer.This decision to show citizens of Pleasantville what they’ve been missing out on is embraced by some but also met with resistance by the town’s citizens who don’t want their lives upended.JOHN QDenzel Washington plays John Quincy Archibald, a factory worker and father who takes a hospital emergency room hostage after the insurance claim for his nine-year-old son’s heart transplant is declined.John Q is a much more severe and gritty example of Character vs. Society in the film than any others on this list and is the stark reality of the difficulties some people face daily.In the movie, John is constantly pushed back against by society as he tries to get care from his son – everywhere he looks, he finds no support and no one willing to help him and his son.Without spoiling too much of the movie, this causes John to take some insane actions in order to do what he can to save his son’s life.THE HUNGER GAMESThe Hunger Games trilogy follows Katniss Everdeen and her conflict with society we see span across the three films.Katniss’s sister, Prism, is initially picked to participate in the dangerous battle to the death known as the Hunger Games.Prism is young and has never had to fight for herself, so Katniss volunteers to take her place to prevent Prism from meeting certain death.Because of the insane risks involved with participating in the Hunger Games, Katniss’s choice takes everyone by surprise as she is essentially volunteering to kill herself.As the series progresses, we see Katniss become an icon by the tyrannized people of Panem (the world in which The Hunger Games takes place) and lead an uprising against the oppressive society and government that favors only its higher-class citizens of Panem.Katniss’s decision to challenge the status quo leads her to become the face of a revolution.ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO’S NESTOne Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest follows Randle P. McMurphy, a mental institution patient who challenges the oppressive and dehumanizing conditions imposed on the patients.In this case, the “society” is the mental institution, its employees, and specifically its head nurse.Throughout the film, you watch the struggle between Randle and the oppressive conditions of the mental institution and in a battle against society that’s isolated to a small group of individuals, but a very poignant and unique example of this type of conflict.Randle tries relentlessly to upend the mental institution’s current authoritarian system in hopes of a better life for himself and his fellow patients.One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest is an example that one’s definition of society can vary from person to person depending on their surroundings and where they live, with the mental institution acting as the society in which Randle is forced to live.THE ROSA PARKS STORYThe Rosa Parks Story follows the life and history-defining moment when Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger.This act of defiance is not only a moment that would reshape the history of the United States but also shows a real-world example of person vs. society.Rosa Parks took a stand for herself and a stand against a longstanding system of racial segregation and discrimination in society.The Rosa Parks story is a paramount representation of person vs. society conflict. One person’s determination to be respected and treated as an equal resulted in a challenge to the oppressive and profoundly discriminatory society of the period.Rosa Parks and her struggles are among the best representations of an unfair conflict between person and society.Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, MissouriThree Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri follows Mildred Hayes, a grieving mother who struggles with local police who failed to solve her daughter’s murder case.Despite Mildred’s best efforts to push them to look further into the case, the police aren’t too interested in helping her.In a desperate attempt to get justice for her daughter, Mildred erects three billboards outside of the town, putting the unsolved crime of her daughter’s murder front and center and criticizing the town’s police.As you can imagine, this sparks a massive conflict between Mildred and law enforcement.Mildred’s determination to seek justice, despite the resistance she faces not just from the police but from the local community and even her own family, showcases a jarring example of person vs. society conflict.The film highlights the tension between individuals who call out society’s flaws and a community that is resistant to change when the issues at hand don’t impact them.ROMEO & JULIETRomeo and Juliet is one of the most timeless and well-known examples of Person vs. Society conflict in literature, and in this case, film.The film follows the romance between Romeo and Juliet, who come from different noble families in Italy.Unfortunately for Romeo and Juliet, their families have been embattled in a long feud, and societal forces drive Romeo and Juliet to keep their relationship a secret.To keep their relationship alive, Romeo and Juliet challenge the social structure to mend the conflict between their families.The film illustrates how two individuals must defy what society says they can and cannot do because of a feud they had nothing to do with while facing exile and betrayal from those around them in their journey for their relationship to be accepted.MULANMulan is a classic Disney film that makes a significant and easy-to-understand example of the Person vs. Society conflict for children.With war looming in China, Mulan sneakily breaks strict gender laws by disguising herself as a man to take her father’s place in the army. At the time, China’s society only deemed men fit to go to war.There’s no better straightforward example of Person vs. Society than what we see in Mulan. She breaks not just the traditional societal expectations placed on women; she commits a crime to do so!Further into the film, we see Mulan struggle with society’s expectations of herself and her expectations of herself in a Person vs. Self-conflict.Mulan defies all of society’s expectations and becomes a formidable warrior and even somewhat of a leader to many of the soldiers she journeys with, all under the guise of being a man.SNOW PIERCERSnowpiercer is another film illustrating the Person vs. Society conflict within a dystopian world. The story takes place aboard a constantly moving train that houses the last human survivors on Earth after a massive catastrophe that left the world frozen and unable to sustain life.We see the film’s protagonist, Curtis, lead a group of what’s considered “lower-class passengers” in a revolt against the class-based system that rules the train.The uprising in the film is another powerful example of Person vs. Society as Curtis and the “lower-class passengers” face off against the status quo, social hierarchy, and injustices that rule the train’s society.As you can imagine, the uprising is met with intense resistance from the “higher-class passengers” and the entire system that rules the train in an attempt to stop the passengers from having equality with the others.Snowpiercer is a fascinating film full of moral questions and unexpected twists – we definitely recommend watching!Learn More About Conflict Styles Seen In Movies!Ultimate Guide To Person vs. Person Conflict In FilmPerson vs. Self Conflict In Film | 10 Best ExamplesUltimate Guide To Person vs. Fate/God In CinemaPerson vs. Nature In Film | 10 Best ExamplesUltimate Guide To Person vs. Technology Conflict In FilmPerson vs. Supernatural Conflict In Film | 10 Greatest ExamplesPerson vs. Self In Disney Movies | Greatest Films & Examples Movies are full of exciting conflicts that keep us glued to our seats. These clashes between characters and outside forces drive the story forward and create drama. External conflicts in films can take many forms, from battles with nature to fights against society. These External conflict examples push characters to grow and change as they face challenges. They give heroes obstacles to overcome and villains to defeat. By looking at examples from popular movies, we can see how filmmakers use external conflicts to build tension and engage viewers. This helps us appreciate the storytelling techniques that make our favorite films so gripping. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character Stars: Daniel Radcliffe, Ralph Fiennes, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint Box Office: $1.342 billion worldwide Runtime: 2h 10m Awards: 3 Academy Award nominations Why It Matters: The final confrontation represents the culmination of a decade-long film series and one of cinema’s most iconic good vs. evil battles Harry Potter vs. Voldemort The final fight between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort is a key moment in the series. This epic clash takes place at Hogwarts Castle during the Battle of Hogwarts. In the movies, the duel is shown as a big, flashy fight. Harry and Voldemort shoot spells at each other, flying around the castle. Their wands connect, creating a beam of light between them. The book version is a bit different. Harry and Voldemort have a talk about who really owns the Elder Wand. This chat isn’t as exciting to watch, so the movies changed it to a more action-packed scene. Both versions end the same way, though. Harry defeats Voldemort once and for all. This battle marks the end of the Second Wizarding War and Voldemort’s reign of terror. The fight between Harry and Voldemort is a classic example of good versus evil. It’s the climax that fans had been waiting for throughout the entire series. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character Stars: Matthew Broderick, James Earl Jones, Jeremy Irons Box Office: $968.5 million worldwide Runtime: 1h 28m Awards: 2 Academy Awards (Best Original Score, Best Original Song) Why It Matters: This Shakespearean story of betrayal and redemption became Disney’s highest-grossing traditionally animated film In Disney’s ‘The Lion King’, the conflict between Simba and his uncle Scar is a key part of the story. Scar wants to be king and gets rid of Simba’s dad, Mufasa, to take over Pride Rock. Simba runs away, thinking he caused his dad’s death. He grows up far from home with his new friends Timon and Pumbaa. Years later, Simba’s old friend Nala finds him. She tells him the Pride Lands are in trouble under Scar’s rule. Simba decides to go back and face Scar. The two lions fight for control of the pride. Scar tries to blame the hyenas for what happened. But Simba stands up to him and makes Scar admit the truth about Mufasa’s death. In the end, Simba wins the battle and takes his place as the rightful king. This conflict shows how Simba grows from a cub into a brave leader who can protect his pride. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character Stars: Sylvester Stallone, Carl Weathers, Talia Shire Box Office: $225 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 2m Awards: 3 Academy Awards including Best Picture Why It Matters: This underdog story revolutionized the sports film genre and launched a successful franchise Rocky Balboa vs. Apollo Creed In the 1976 film ‘Rocky’, a classic external conflict unfolds between Rocky Balboa and Apollo Creed. Rocky, a small-time boxer from Philadelphia, gets an unexpected shot at the world heavyweight championship. Apollo Creed, the reigning champ, picks Rocky as his opponent when his original challenger drops out. This sets up a David vs. Goliath matchup that nobody expects Rocky to win. The conflict intensifies as Rocky trains hard to prove he’s not just another bum from the neighborhood. Meanwhile, Apollo underestimates Rocky, seeing the fight as more of a show than a real challenge. Their clash in the ring becomes legendary. Rocky surprises everyone by going the distance with Apollo, something no other fighter had done before. The bout tests both men’s physical and mental limits. This external conflict drives the movie’s plot and character development. It shows how an underdog can rise to the occasion when given a chance. The fight also forces Apollo to confront his own assumptions and complacency as champion. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Society Stars: Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Woody Harrelson Box Office: $694.4 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 22m Awards: People’s Choice Award for Favorite Movie Why It Matters: Launched a successful franchise that tackled themes of rebellion and social inequality The Districts vs. The Capitol The Hunger Games shows a powerful example of rebellion against an oppressive government. The Capitol, led by President Snow, controls the districts through fear and the annual Hunger Games. Katniss Everdeen becomes the face of the rebellion. Her actions in the arena spark hope and defiance in the districts. She refuses to play by the Capitol’s rules and shows compassion for other tributes. The mockingjay pin becomes a symbol of the rebellion. It represents resistance and unity among the districts. As the uprising grows, more people join the fight against the Capitol’s tyranny. The rebels use propaganda to spread their message. They film propos featuring Katniss to inspire others and counter the Capitol’s lies. This media war plays a crucial role in gaining support. District 13, thought to be destroyed, emerges as the rebellion’s headquarters. They provide military support and leadership to the other districts. The fight against the Capitol escalates into a full-scale war. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character Stars: Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Don Rickles Box Office: $373.6 million worldwide Runtime: 1h 21m Awards: Special Achievement Academy Award Why It Matters: The first fully computer-animated feature film, revolutionizing animation and storytelling Woody vs. Buzz Lightyear Woody and Buzz Lightyear’s rivalry is a key external conflict in the 1995 animated film ‘Toy Story’. Woody, a cowboy doll, starts as Andy’s favorite toy. But when Buzz arrives as a birthday gift, things change. Buzz is a space ranger action figure who thinks he’s real. His cool gadgets and flashy style quickly win Andy over. This makes Woody jealous and afraid of losing his place. The two toys clash as Woody tries to prove he’s still the best. He even pushes Buzz out a window by accident. This leads to both of them getting lost and having to work together to get home. Their rivalry causes problems for the other toys too. The group has to choose sides between their old leader and the exciting newcomer. As Woody and Buzz face dangers together, they slowly become friends. They learn to respect each other’s strengths and work as a team. By the end, they’ve moved past their rivalry to become close pals. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Technology/Character vs. Nature (alien force) Stars: Will Smith, Jeff Goldblum, Bill Pullman Box Office: $817.4 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 25m Awards: Academy Award for Best Visual Effects Why It Matters: Defined the modern summer blockbuster and set new standards for visual effects Humanity vs. Aliens ‘Independence Day’ shows a classic fight between humans and aliens. The movie came out in 1996 and was a big hit. It’s about aliens coming to Earth to take over. The aliens are super strong. They have big spaceships and powerful weapons. At first, they crush human armies easily. They blow up major cities around the world. Humans are in big trouble. But they don’t give up. They work together to find a way to beat the aliens. The main characters come up with a clever plan. They use the aliens’ own tech against them. A computer virus helps bring down the alien shields. Then human pilots fly into the alien ships to blow them up from inside. This movie is fun because it shows humans winning against huge odds. Even though the aliens seem unbeatable, humans find a way. It’s a feel-good story about beating a tough enemy. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Society & Character vs. Nature Stars: Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet, Billy Zane Box Office: $2.201 billion worldwide Runtime: 3h 14m Awards: 11 Academy Awards including Best Picture Why It Matters: Became a cultural phenomenon and held the record for highest-grossing film for 12 years Jack and Rose vs. Society The 1997 film ‘Titanic’ shows a clear clash between social classes. Jack comes from a poor background, while Rose is part of the upper class. Their different worlds create tension throughout the movie. Rose feels trapped by her high-society life and engagement to Cal. Jack offers her a glimpse of freedom and adventure. The ship itself represents this divide. First-class passengers enjoy luxury, while third-class travelers like Jack are in cramped quarters below deck. Rose’s mother and fiancé try to keep her away from Jack. They see him as a threat to their way of life and social standing. Jack and Rose’s relationship breaks social rules. Their love story challenges the strict class system of the early 1900s. The sinking of the Titanic puts these class differences in stark contrast. Rich passengers get priority for lifeboats, while poorer ones are left behind. Through it all, Jack and Rose’s bond grows stronger. Their connection shows that true feelings can overcome social barriers. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Society/Character vs. Character Stars: Chris Evans, Hugo Weaving, Sebastian Stan Box Office: $370.6 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 4m Awards: Visual Effects Society Award nomination Why It Matters: Launched Captain America in the MCU and established a key foundation for the Avengers saga Captain America vs. Hydra In ‘Captain America: The First Avenger,’ Steve Rogers faces off against the evil organization Hydra. This conflict forms a key part of the movie’s plot. Hydra, led by the Red Skull, wants to use powerful weapons to take over the world. Captain America and his team work to stop them. The movie shows several exciting battles between Cap and Hydra forces. In one scene, Captain America breaks into a Hydra base to free captured soldiers. Another big fight happens on a plane. Cap takes on multiple Hydra soldiers in close combat. These action-packed scenes highlight the clash between good and evil. Throughout the film, Captain America destroys Hydra bases across Europe. He uses his shield, strength, and quick thinking to beat the bad guys. The conflict comes to a head in a final showdown with the Red Skull. This battle decides the fate of the world and tests Captain America’s heroism. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Technology Stars: Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss Box Office: $463.5 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 16m Awards: 4 Academy Awards including Best Visual Effects Why It Matters: Revolutionized special effects with “bullet time” and influenced sci-fi storytelling for decades Neo vs. The Matrix In the sci-fi classic ‘The Matrix’, Neo faces a huge external conflict against the virtual reality system that controls humanity. At first, Neo doesn’t even know he’s living in a fake world. When Morpheus offers Neo the red pill, it kicks off his fight against the Matrix. Neo has to learn how to bend the rules of this digital world to his advantage. The Matrix fights back through its Agents, especially the relentless Agent Smith. These battles test Neo’s growing abilities and determination. As Neo gets stronger, he starts to see the code that makes up the Matrix. This lets him do amazing things like stop bullets and fly. The conflict reaches its peak when Neo fully accepts his role as “The One”. He can now manipulate the Matrix at will, setting the stage for humanity’s rebellion against the machines. This struggle between Neo and the Matrix explores big ideas about reality, free will, and the nature of control. It’s a fight that goes beyond just physical action, touching on deep philosophical questions. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character (though both are technological beings) Stars: Shia LaBeouf, Megan Fox, Peter Cullen Box Office: $709.7 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 24m Awards: 3 Academy Award nominations for technical achievements Why It Matters: Successfully brought a beloved toy franchise to life and set new standards for CGI integration with live action Autobots vs. Decepticons The Transformers movies showcase an epic battle between two robotic factions: the Autobots and the Decepticons. This long-standing conflict forms the core of the franchise’s plot. The Autobots, led by Optimus Prime, are the good guys. They want to protect Earth and its inhabitants. The Decepticons, under Megatron’s command, aim to conquer and destroy. Their fight began on their home planet, Cybertron. It later spread to Earth when both groups arrived here. The robots disguise themselves as vehicles and everyday objects to blend in. The movies feature intense action scenes with these giant robots duking it out. They use advanced weapons and their ability to transform into vehicles during combat. Cities often become battlegrounds, with humans caught in the crossfire. The stakes are high, as the fate of Earth hangs in the balance. This conflict drives the plot forward in each Transformers film. It provides plenty of thrilling moments and spectacular visual effects for viewers to enjoy. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character & Character vs. Society Stars: Jennifer Lawrence, Donald Sutherland, Josh Hutcherson Box Office: $694.4 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 22m Awards: Critics’ Choice Movie Award for Best Actress in an Action Movie Why It Matters: Portrays a complex political conflict through the lens of a personal vendetta, inspiring real-world discussions about power and resistance Katniss vs. President Snow Katniss Everdeen and President Snow face off in a deadly battle of wits in “The Hunger Games.” Their conflict starts when Katniss outsmarts the Gamemakers, allowing both her and Peeta to survive the 74th Hunger Games. Snow sees Katniss as a threat to his power. He views her actions as rebellion against the Capitol’s control. This leads to a tense relationship between them throughout the series. Katniss becomes a symbol of hope for the districts. She inspires people to stand up against the Capitol’s cruel rule. Snow tries to crush this hope by making Katniss’s life difficult. Their struggle intensifies as Katniss continues to defy Snow’s expectations. She survives another Hunger Games and becomes the face of the rebellion. Snow responds with increasingly harsh tactics to maintain control. The conflict between Katniss and Snow represents the larger struggle between freedom and oppression in Panem. Their personal battle mirrors the fight between the districts and the Capitol. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Society Stars: Leonardo DiCaprio, Claire Danes, John Leguizamo Box Office: $147.5 million worldwide Runtime: 2h Awards: BAFTA Award for Best Production Design Why It Matters: Modernized Shakespeare’s classic tale of feuding families for a new generation Montagues vs. Capulets The Montagues and Capulets are two feuding families in Shakespeare’s famous play. Their long-standing rivalry sets the stage for the tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet. These noble houses of Verona have been enemies for generations. No one really knows why they started fighting in the first place. But their hatred runs deep and affects everyone in the city. The conflict between the families causes lots of trouble. Street brawls break out when members from each side meet. Even their servants get caught up in the fighting. This feud creates major obstacles for Romeo and Juliet’s romance. The two teens fall in love at first sight, not realizing they’re from rival families. When they find out, it’s already too late. Their secret relationship leads to more violence and death. Romeo ends up killing Juliet’s cousin Tybalt in a duel. This makes the families even angrier at each other. In the end, Romeo and Juliet’s deaths finally make the Montagues and Capulets realize how stupid their fight was. They agree to end their feud, but at a terrible cost. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character Stars: Christian Bale, Heath Ledger, Aaron Eckhart Box Office: $1.005 billion worldwide Runtime: 2h 32m Awards: 2 Academy Awards including Heath Ledger’s posthumous Best Supporting Actor Why It Matters: Redefined the superhero genre and features one of cinema’s most memorable villain performances Batman vs. The Joker The Dark Knight features an intense clash between Batman and his nemesis, the Joker. Their confrontation reaches its peak in a memorable interrogation scene. The Joker has kidnapped Harvey Dent and Rachel Dawes, leaving Batman desperate for answers. In the police station, Batman tries to get information from the Joker about their whereabouts. As the scene unfolds, the Joker taunts Batman and shares his twisted view of the world. He pushes Batman’s buttons, testing the hero’s moral limits. Batman loses his cool and starts hitting the Joker. But the villain just laughs it off, showing how he thrives on chaos and violence. This face-off highlights the stark contrast between the two characters. Batman struggles to maintain order and justice, while the Joker aims to spread chaos and destruction. The scene builds tension as Batman realizes he’s running out of time to save his friends. It showcases the ongoing battle between good and evil in Gotham City. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Society & Character vs. Technology Stars: Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Sigourney Weaver Box Office: $2.923 billion worldwide Runtime: 2h 42m Awards: 3 Academy Awards including Best Visual Effects Why It Matters: Revolutionized 3D filmmaking and explored themes of environmentalism and colonialism Humans vs. Na’vi The movie Avatar shows a big fight between humans and the Na’vi people on the planet Pandora. The humans want to mine a valuable mineral called unobtanium from the Na’vi’s land. The Na’vi have a deep bond with nature and see their world as sacred. They don’t want the humans to destroy their home. This puts them at odds with the human miners and soldiers. The humans use powerful machines and weapons to try to force the Na’vi off their land. They don’t care about hurting the planet or the Na’vi way of life. Jake Sully, a human in a Na’vi body, gets caught between the two sides. He learns to love the Na’vi culture and has to choose which group to help. The conflict gets worse until there’s a big battle. The Na’vi fight to protect their home from the human invaders who want to take their resources. This clash shows how different beliefs about nature and progress can lead to war. It makes viewers think about real-world issues like colonialism and environmental protection. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Society & Character vs. Character Stars: Tom Cruise, Rebecca Ferguson, Jeremy Renner Box Office: $682.7 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 11m Awards: Critics’ Choice Movie Award nomination for Best Action Movie Why It Matters: Elevated the espionage genre with practical stunts and complex plotting Ethan Hunt vs. The Syndicate In “Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation,” Ethan Hunt faces off against a powerful enemy called the Syndicate. This shadowy group was once a secret British intelligence project gone rogue. The Syndicate, led by the cunning Solomon Lane, carries out terrorist attacks around the world. Ethan and his team must stop them before they cause more harm. Hunt’s mission is tough because his own agency, the IMF, has been shut down. The CIA is after him too. He has to work outside the system to expose the Syndicate. Ethan teams up with Ilsa Faust, a skilled operative with unclear loyalties. Together, they chase clues and dodge danger across the globe. The conflict between Ethan and the Syndicate involves high-stakes chases, clever schemes, and nail-biting action scenes. From underwater exploits to high-speed motorcycle pursuits, Ethan pushes himself to the limit. As Ethan gets closer to the truth, he uncovers a web of lies and betrayal. The fight against the Syndicate tests his skills, courage, and trust in others. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character & Character vs. Society Stars: Elijah Wood, Ian McKellen, Viggo Mortensen Box Office: $897.7 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 58m Awards: 4 Academy Awards, nominated for 13 including Best Picture Why It Matters: Set new standards for fantasy filmmaking and practical effects combined with CGI Frodo vs. Sauron’s Forces Frodo Baggins faces a huge challenge in ‘The Lord of the Rings’. He must destroy the One Ring in Mount Doom while avoiding Sauron’s armies. Sauron sends his Nazgûl to find Frodo and the Ring. These scary riders chase Frodo from the Shire all the way to Rivendell. In Mordor, Frodo and Sam sneak past orcs and other evil creatures. They have to be super careful not to get caught. The biggest test comes at Mount Doom. Frodo has to fight off Gollum, who wants the Ring for himself. At the same time, Sauron’s Eye is searching for them. Frodo’s friends help by fighting at the Black Gate. This keeps Sauron busy, giving Frodo a chance to reach Mount Doom. In the end, Frodo succeeds against the odds. He manages to destroy the Ring despite all of Sauron’s efforts to stop him. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character & Character vs. Society Stars: Russell Crowe, Joaquin Phoenix, Connie Nielsen Box Office: $460.6 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 35m Awards: 5 Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Actor Why It Matters: Revived the historical epic genre and influenced countless films that followed Maximus vs. Commodus Maximus faces a huge challenge in ‘Gladiator’. He’s a former Roman general who becomes a slave and gladiator. His enemy is the new emperor Commodus, who killed Maximus’ family. Maximus fights in the arena to stay alive. He also wants to get revenge on Commodus. The arena battles are scary and violent. Maximus has to use all his skills to win. Meanwhile, Commodus runs the Roman Empire. He’s not a good leader. He’s mean and doesn’t care about the people. Commodus sees Maximus as a threat to his power. The movie shows how Maximus fights against Commodus’ whole system. It’s not just about beating other gladiators. Maximus has to outsmart Commodus and win over the crowd. This conflict is bigger than just two men fighting. It’s about what’s right for Rome. Maximus stands for honor and justice. Commodus stands for greed and selfishness. The final battle between Maximus and Commodus is super tense. It’s the climax of their long struggle. The fate of Rome hangs in the balance as they fight. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Society & Character vs. Technology Stars: Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Harrison Ford Box Office: $2.068 billion worldwide Runtime: 2h 16m Awards: 5 Academy Award nominations Why It Matters: Successfully rebooted the Star Wars franchise for a new generation The Resistance vs. First Order The Force Awakens shows a new conflict in the Star Wars galaxy. The First Order, a group that formed after the Empire fell, wants to take over. They’re up against the Resistance, a small force fighting to stop them. The movie doesn’t explain everything about this war right away. It drops viewers into the action, like the original Star Wars did. We see the First Order attacking villages and the Resistance trying to protect people. Both sides have cool new tech. The First Order has a huge weapon called Starkiller Base. The Resistance has updated X-wing fighters. These new gadgets add to the excitement of their battles. The war affects the main characters in different ways. Rey and Finn get caught up in it by accident. Poe Dameron is already a top Resistance pilot. Their personal stories mix with the bigger conflict. This war is a key part of the movie’s plot. It creates tension and drives the action forward. It also sets up more battles for future Star Wars films. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Nature & Character vs. Technology Stars: Sam Neill, Laura Dern, Jeff Goldblum Box Office: $914 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 7m Awards: 3 Academy Awards including Best Visual Effects Why It Matters: Revolutionized CGI in films and created a new standard for creature features Humans vs. Dinosaurs Jurassic Park pits humans against genetically revived dinosaurs in a thrilling battle for survival. The film explores what happens when prehistoric creatures clash with modern humans in an isolated theme park setting. Scientists and visitors find themselves trapped on an island with escaped dinosaurs. They must use their wits and limited resources to stay alive against formidable predators like velociraptors and T. rex. The humans are massively outmatched physically by the dinosaurs. This creates intense chase sequences as people try to evade and outsmart the powerful beasts hunting them. Key scenes show people hiding from searching raptors or fleeing the massive T. rex. The size and speed difference between humans and dinosaurs adds to the suspense. This conflict highlights themes of mankind’s hubris in trying to control nature. It also showcases human ingenuity as characters find creative ways to survive against seemingly impossible odds. The movie’s iconic scenes of dinosaur attacks have thrilled audiences for decades. They perfectly capture the terror and excitement of this unique human vs. beast conflict. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character & Character vs. Society Stars: Johnny Depp, Mia Wasikowska, Helena Bonham Carter Box Office: $1.025 billion worldwide Runtime: 1h 48m Awards: 2 Academy Awards for Art Direction and Costume Design Why It Matters: Gave a dark, visual twist to a classic tale and proved the commercial viability of 3D films Alice vs. Red Queen Alice faces off against the Red Queen in a tense showdown. The Red Queen, a bossy chess piece, tries to control Alice’s moves in the Looking-Glass world. Alice must navigate the Queen’s strict rules and odd behavior. The Queen runs at breakneck speed but never seems to get anywhere, confusing Alice. Their encounter is filled with strange conversations and nonsensical logic. The Queen tests Alice’s manners and patience with her demanding nature. As Alice grows more frustrated, she stands up to the Queen’s authority. She challenges the Queen’s power and questions the rules of this topsy-turvy world. This conflict shows Alice’s growth as she learns to assert herself. She pushes back against the absurd demands of Wonderland’s characters. The Red Queen represents the confusing adult world Alice is trying to understand. Their clash highlights Alice’s struggle to make sense of her surreal surroundings. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character Stars: Tobey Maguire, Willem Dafoe, Kirsten Dunst Box Office: $825 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 1m Awards: 2 Academy Award nominations for Visual Effects and Sound Why It Matters: Helped launch the modern superhero movie era and proved comic book films could be both critically and commercially successful Spider-Man vs. Green Goblin The 2002 movie “Spider-Man” features an exciting battle between the hero and his nemesis, the Green Goblin. This fight is a classic example of external conflict in film. Spider-Man, played by Tobey Maguire, faces off against Willem Dafoe’s Green Goblin in several intense scenes. Their confrontations are filled with high-flying action and explosive moments. The Green Goblin uses pumpkin bombs and other gadgets to attack Spider-Man. Meanwhile, our web-slinging hero relies on his agility and quick thinking to dodge attacks and strike back. One memorable fight takes place in a burning building. Spider-Man must protect innocent people while battling the Goblin. This adds extra tension to their clash. Their final showdown is particularly brutal. It pushes Spider-Man to his limits as he struggles against a seemingly stronger foe. The fight shows how determined Peter Parker is to protect his city. These battles between Spider-Man and the Green Goblin are key to the movie’s plot. They showcase the ongoing struggle between good and evil that defines superhero stories. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Society & Character vs. Character Stars: Viggo Mortensen, Orlando Bloom, Bernard Hill Box Office: $936.7 million worldwide Runtime: 2h 59m Awards: 2 Academy Awards for Visual Effects and Sound Editing Why It Matters: Set new standards for epic battle sequences and remains one of cinema’s most impressive siege warfare depictions The Battle of Helm’s Deep The battle of Helm’s Deep is a big fight scene in the movie “The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers.” It takes place at a fortress called Helm’s Deep in the land of Rohan. The good guys, led by King Théoden, are stuck in the fortress. They’re trying to fight off a huge army of bad guys sent by the evil wizard Saruman. This battle is super intense. There are thousands of bad guys attacking the walls of Helm’s Deep. The good guys are way outnumbered, but they keep fighting hard. The fight goes on all night. Things look bad for the good guys for a while. But then help arrives just in time. Gandalf the wizard shows up with more soldiers. In the end, the good guys win the battle. It’s a big turning point in the story. The battle of Helm’s Deep is one of the coolest and biggest fight scenes ever put in a movie. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Supernatural/Nature Stars: Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis, Sigourney Weaver Box Office: $295.2 million worldwide Runtime: 1h 45m Awards: 2 Academy Award nominations Why It Matters: Successfully blended comedy with supernatural action, creating a new hybrid genre Ghostbusters vs. Supernatural Forces The Ghostbusters face a wild external conflict in the Big Apple. They battle spooky spirits and slimy specters all over town. These paranormal problems pop up in famous NYC spots like the New York Public Library and Central Park. The team zaps ghosts with their cool proton packs. They chase down floating blobs and scary creatures through busy streets. Sometimes they even end up covered in slime! But it’s not just the ghosts they’re up against. The Ghostbusters also have to deal with skeptical New Yorkers and grumpy city officials. Many people don’t believe in ghosts and think the team is crazy. As more ghosts appear, the city gets messier and scarier. The Ghostbusters work hard to save New York from total ghost takeover. They zoom around in their converted ambulance, always ready for the next spooky call. Their biggest challenge comes when a giant marshmallow man stomps through the city. Talk about a sticky situation! The team has to use all their ghost-busting skills to stop this massive, puffy monster. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Character Stars: Alexander Skarsgård, Millie Bobby Brown, Rebecca Hall Box Office: $470 million worldwide Runtime: 1h 53m Awards: Visual Effects Society Award nominations Why It Matters: Brought together two of cinema’s most iconic monsters in a modern special effects spectacle Kong vs. Godzilla King Kong and Godzilla are two iconic movie monsters who have clashed on screen multiple times. Their epic battles pit the giant ape against the radioactive lizard in city-destroying brawls. The idea of these titans fighting stems from an ancient conflict between their species. Long ago, Kong’s ancestors and Godzilla’s kind allegedly waged war against each other. This prehistoric struggle forms the backstory for their modern-day rivalry. It adds depth to their confrontations, making them more than just random monster fights. In the movies, the two behemoths duke it out using their unique strengths. Kong relies on his agility and intelligence. Godzilla counters with his atomic breath and durability. Their battles often leave cities in ruins as collateral damage. Skyscrapers crumble and streets crack open while the monsters trade blows. Fans debate which creature is stronger. The movies sometimes end with a clear winner, but other times the fight is left unresolved. External Conflict Type: Character vs. Technology & Character vs. Society Stars: Arnold Schwarzenegger, Linda Hamilton, Michael Biehn Box Office: $78.3 million worldwide Runtime: 1h 47m Awards: Inducted into the National Film Registry Why It Matters: Defined the tech-noir genre and explored artificial intelligence dangers before they became mainstream concerns Humans vs. Skynet In the Terminator movies, humans fight against Skynet, an evil computer system. Skynet takes over the world and tries to wipe out all people. The main character, John Connor, leads the human army. They use old weapons and hide in ruined cities to stay alive. Skynet has robot soldiers called Terminators that hunt down humans. People have to be smart and tough to beat the machines. They make plans to destroy Skynet’s main computer. It’s really hard because Skynet is so powerful and has lots of robots. The humans keep fighting even when things look bad. They know if they give up, all people will die. Some brave humans even go back in time to try to stop Skynet before it starts. This fight shows how humans can be strong when they work together. It also warns about letting computers get too much control over our lives. After analyzing these 25 iconic movie conflicts, several interesting patterns emerge: Hybrid Conflicts: Modern blockbusters often combine multiple types of external conflict. For example, ‘Avatar’ blends character vs. society with character vs. technology themes. Evolution of Technology Conflicts: From ‘The Terminator’ (1984) to modern films like ‘Avatar’, the portrayal of technology-based conflicts has evolved to reflect changing societal concerns about AI, virtual reality, and environmental impact. Box Office Impact: Films featuring clear, compelling external conflicts consistently perform well at the box office, with 17 of our 25 examples earning over $500 million worldwide. Visual Effects Revolution: The way these conflicts are portrayed has evolved dramatically, from practical effects in early films like ‘Terminator’ to the sophisticated CGI of ‘Godzilla vs. Kong’, showing how technology has enhanced storytelling capabilities. Social Commentary: Many of these conflicts, especially in more recent films, use external conflicts to comment on real-world issues: Environmental concerns (‘Avatar’, ‘Jurassic Park’) Class warfare (‘The Hunger Games’, ‘Titanic’) Technology ethics (‘The Matrix’, ‘The Terminator’) Genre Blending: Successful films often combine different types of external conflict to create more complex narratives, appealing to broader audiences while adding depth to their stories. External conflict is a clash between a character and something in their environment. This can be another person, nature, society, or technology. It’s visible to others in the story. External conflict often leads to action and physical confrontations. Some common types are: Character vs. character Character vs. nature Character vs. society Character vs. technology These conflicts push characters to make choices and grow. They also reveal important traits about the characters as they respond to challenges. External conflict is key to engaging plots in movies. It gives characters clear goals to work towards. The struggle against outside forces keeps viewers interested and rooting for the main character. This type of conflict: Creates drama and excitement Moves the story forward Reveals character strengths and flaws Allows for character growth Provides opportunities for action scenes Good external conflicts feel realistic and important. They match the movie’s tone and themes. When done well, they make viewers care about what happens next. Movies use different types of external conflicts to create tension and drive the plot forward. These conflicts pit characters against outside forces, leading to dramatic struggles and character growth. This type of conflict involves a clash between two or more characters. It’s common in action movies, thrillers, and dramas. The main character faces off against a clear enemy or rival. In “The Dark Knight,” Batman battles the Joker. Their conflict goes beyond physical fights to a battle of ideologies. Sports movies often use this conflict. “Rocky” shows the underdog boxer Rocky Balboa training to fight the champion Apollo Creed. Westerns frequently feature Man vs. Man conflicts. “The Good, the Good, the Bad and the Ugly” has three gunslingers competing for buried gold. This conflict pits characters against natural forces or disasters. It’s popular in survival and disaster films. Characters must overcome harsh environments or catastrophic events. “The Revenant” shows a fur trapper fighting to survive in the wilderness after a bear attack. He faces extreme cold, lack of food, and dangerous terrain. In “Twisters,” storm chasers pursue tornadoes while trying to stay alive. The unpredictable nature of the storms creates constant tension. “Gravity” features astronauts stranded in space after their shuttle is destroyed. They struggle against the deadly vacuum of space to return to Earth. This conflict shows characters challenging social norms, institutions, or oppressive systems. It’s common in dystopian films, social dramas, and some superhero movies. “The Hunger Games” depicts Katniss Everdeen rebelling against a cruel government that forces teens to fight to the death for entertainment. “Dead Poets Society” shows students clashing with their school’s strict rules as they embrace creativity and free thinking. In “V for Vendetta,” the main character fights against a totalitarian regime, inspiring others to join the rebellion. Man vs society involves the protagonist in a fight against the powers-that-be in the society surrounding them. It is one of six types of conflict in literature and film and categorized as an external conflict. The man vs society conflict plotline is appealing to authors who want to draw attention to issues of social justice, challenge social norms, or explore the lives and experiences of the outcast, marginalized, and oppressed. A famous example of the man vs society plot can be seen in the Hunger Games movies, where the protagonist, Katniss, leads a revolution against the authoritarian government that is oppressing her community. Man vs Society Conflict: When to Use It Comprehension Questions: As you read through this article, our editor Chris will pose comprehension and critical thinking questions to help you get the most out of this article. Teachers, if you assign this article for homework, have the students answer these questions at home, then use them as stimuli for in-class discussion. At its core, man vs society is a clash between an individual’s wants and needs versus what is expected from them by others and society at large. This type of conflict can manifest in many different ways. For example, it may involve rebelling against unjust social hierarchies or standing up for one’s beliefs in the face of widespread opposition. The core obstacle or ‘challenge’ in these plotlines tends to be societal pressures or prejudices faced by the protagonist. But these conflicts also highlight how individuals can challenge and change society’s views for better outcomes or fight against refusal to stand up to what is wrong. The messages that authors try to convey through the man vs society conflict in literature are often centered around themes such as individualism, freedom, morality, and justice. When a protagonist stands up against societal norms or expectations, it sends a message that individuality is important and that there should be room for people to express themselves as they are without fear of repression. Another message conveyed through this type of conflict is the importance of challenging authority when those in power use their position to oppress or discriminate against others. It emphasizes the need to fight for justice and fairness. Comprehension Checkpoint: What unique morals, stories, and messages can man vs society plotlines portray that other types of conflict cannot? 1984 (George Orwell): In a totalitarian society, the protagonist named Winston fights against a government that seeks to control every aspect of citizens’ lives, including their thoughts and actions. Brave New World (Aldous Huxley): In a society where people are genetically engineered to fit certain roles and never allowed to experience true emotions or passions, the protagonist John challenges the status quo and chooses a life of rebellion in search of authenticity over superficial happiness, with tragic results. Fahrenheit 451 (Ray Bradbury): A world where books are outlawed, Guy Montag rebels against his oppressive government by becoming an outlaw reader and joining forces with underground thinkers who preserve literature against censorship. The Handmaid’s Tale (Margaret Atwood): This book (and subsequent film) depicts a dystopian society where fertile women have become surrogates for powerful men’s offspring because of declining birth rates due to pollution, Offred strives to regain her freedom while attempting to overthrow oppressive male supremacy. The Hunger Games (Suzanne Collins): Set in a post-apocalyptic world governed by “the Capitol,” Katniss Everdeen defies norms by taking her sister’s place as tribute in the games—an annual competition that pits districts against each other; it is televised nationwide until one team emerges as winners. Katniss uses the games against the capitol to inspire an uprising. Comprehension Checkpoint: Man vs society conflicts often depict strawmen of left-wing and right-wing political ideologies. Can you think of a book or movie that critiques the following ideologies: communism/socialism, capitalism, authoritarianism, and dictatorship? Animal Farm (George Orwell): When the animals on a farm overthrow their human owner for control, they fight to keep their equal status, while some become corrupted and exploit others. The animal society in this film is an allegory for communism. Lord of the Flies (William Golding): After becoming stranded on an uninhabited island, a group of boys attempts to govern themselves, which rapidly turns into disorder and nearly fatal anarchy due to primitive savagery fueled by fear and power. The Giver (Lois Lowry): In a controlled community devoid of emotions or pain, Jonas, the protagonist, is selected to become the next receiver of memories. He discovers uncomfortable hidden truths about his society, shattering his beliefs and causing him to question his beliefs, and leading him to clash against the powers that be. The Trial (Franz Kafka): This novel portrays Joseph K’s indecision when he is accused by the ruling government agency for a crime, without knowing what he has done wrong. He is left disorientated, with juridical absurdity surrounding him within a dehumanizing bureaucracy. The Scarlet Letter (Nathaniel Hawthorne): When Hester Prynne becomes pregnant outside of marriage in Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony in 17th-century America, she is subjected to public shaming and religious punishments imposed on her by the ultra-conservative society. Comprehension Checkpoint: Many plots combine a range of different types of conflict in literature. Of the above five examples, can you identify that employ one of the different forms of conflict? (For a refresher on the different types of conflict, read here). A Clockwork Orange (Anthony Burgess): In a dystopian future that pits youngsters against the authorities, delinquent Alex is imprisoned and subjected to violent rehabilitation treatment causing intense internal conflict where fate steps in, leaving it impossible for him to reacclimate to society, with the conclusion leading to uncertainty. The Grapes of Wrath (John Steinbeck): During the Great Depression, Tom Joad and his family uproot their lives when forced out by exploitative landowners and head towards California with thousands similarly migrating, where they face new challenges including police brutality and struggles to find work for better living conditions. The Catcher in the Rye (J.D. Salinger): Holden Caulfield navigates through society’s expectations, trying desperately not to conform while he attempts to make sense of death along with struggling against societal norms eventually undergoing his own realization allowing reflection on life’s intricacies. The Great Gatsby (F. Scott Fitzgerald): Through eyes of Nick Carraway as an observer, readers explore Jay Gatsby’s extravagant lifestyle trying hard at social standing influenced by love for Daisy Buchanan displaying how wealth doesn’t equal happiness or fulfillment as it can deceive even the most passionate amongst us. To Kill a Mockingbird (Harper Lee): Set during racial tensions circulating America’s South; Atticus Finch defends a black man under false accusations while dealing with prejudices operating within his town showcasing racial inequalities and posing moral questions before calling upon decision-making. Comprehension Checkpoint: One great advantage of man vs society conflict plots is that they can give us deep human experiences of horrific historical events so we can learn from them. Of the four plots just mentioned, are you able to contextualize them within specific eras in American history, and what social upheavals or injustices were occurring at the time? Slaughterhouse-Five (Kurt Vonnegut): Billy Pilgrim, a disillusioned soldier who is abducted by aliens, experiences flashbacks to his time during the Dresden bombing and struggles with society’s inability to reconcile trauma’s impact on mental health. One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (Ken Kesey): Randle McMurphy feigns mental illness to serve in an asylum where he challenges the psychotic nurse Ratched’s authority and attempts to bring humanity back into the lives of oppressed patients while ultimately retaliating against societal institutions that oppressed them. The Outsiders (S.E. Hinton): Set during social class distinctions in Tulsa, youth Ponyboy Curtis struggles against class-based stereotypes and societal expectations as he comes to terms with violence among rival factions causing bloodshed via gang culture prevalent amongst adolescents. A Handful of Dust (Evelyn Waugh): In the upper echelons of English society, Tony Last falls into financial ruin when deceived by his wife Brenda; as he searches for meaning in his life amidst treacherously damaged bonds revealing codes governing social mobility premiering juxtaposed facets crystallizing the woes of higher classes. Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe): Okonkwo, an influential wrestler in colonial Nigeria tries hard not to succumb to British colonialism but fails as it causes a significant cultural shift within Ibo society resulting in tragedies caused by internal faction divisions along with enduring enslavement due to societal norms. Comprehension Checkpoint: At times, man vs society conflicts depict hypothetical societies of the future. What warnings do you think are most common within futuristic man vs society (often, man vs dystopia) stories? (Hint: check out my article on man vs technology for further insights into these messages!) The Road (Cormac McCarthy): A father and son face hostile terrain and dangerous gangs of cannibals as they trek to the coast in a post-apocalyptic world; where society’s expectations previously centered on morality, death, scarcity, self-preservation, and despair now potentially aiding amorality amongst general population. The Trial (Robert Whitlow): Criminal defense attorney’s faith is pushed to its limits when trying to defend former female drug trafficker being put on trial whose past life rising out of poverty posing challenges against societal standards for people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The Power (Naomi Alderman): A fictional novel about women acquiring supernatural abilities that turn the tides after centuries of gender discrimination leading to movement fighting against patriarchy’s grip while causing shifts towards it within societies. The Dispossessed (Ursula K. Le Guin): Through narrative storytelling depicting two planets: one is capitalistic while other communistic following the perspective of physicist Shevek attempting to bridge disparity among them highlighting social divisions predicated by individualism/collectivism influencing metaphysical inquiry and scientific knowledge. The Circle (Dave Eggers): Mae Holland joins the fictitious Silicon Valley-based tech giant company named “the Circle,” where providing transparency through technology slowly morphs into socio-political power engulfment raising questions about privacy infringement as individuals try finding ways that stimulate their moral compass. Man vs society conflicts inspire readers by encouraging them not to conform but instead strive towards being defined by their own beliefs and standing strong against oppressive systems. The author strives to get across messages that are deeper than just the story in the book itself, but reflect universal political values of right vs wrong. These plotlines can therefore create social awareness about issues surrounding race, gender identity, class differences, and so on.