

# Archetypes

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Have I seen you somewhere before?

Make a list of a few heroes and heroines from some movies or a books you know.

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Go ahead. I'll wait.

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The Doctor from Dr. Who,  
Rey from Star Wars: The  
Force Awakens.  
and Sherlock Holmes!

Or how about Thor, Elsa,  
Anna and Mulan?



Now that you have a few heroes / heroines in mind, think about what characteristics they all share.

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So ...What characteristics **do**  
all heroes share?



Courage in the  
face of  
adversity

*Willingness to do  
the right thing,  
even when it's  
difficult*

*Loyalty to  
their friends /  
loved ones*

*The ability to  
inspire others*

Gee ...I feel so inspired now!



Have you ever wondered WHY heroes and heroines have these features in common?

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Now that you mention it...



There are a lot of reasons, actually, but one important reason is that they all fit the pattern of the Hero Archetype.

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Archi-what-now?



An archetype is a pattern of ideas or images that is so basic, that people can understand it quickly and almost automatically.

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So?



So by understanding archetypes, you can understand all of the characters in movies and books.

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Seriously?



Absolutely! Let's go back to the hero archetype for a moment. According to the the hero / heroine archetype, the hero or heroine in a story usually struggles against evil or oppression and saves people, right?

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Okay ...



All heroes and heroines follow that pattern one way or another. Katniss struggles against the oppressive Capitol to bring justice to Panem

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Batman struggles against evil  
supervillains to bring justice to Gotham  
City.

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Mulan struggles against the Huns (and gender discrimination) to bring peace and harmony to China.

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Dorothy kills the Wicked Witches of the East and West to bring peace to Munchkinland and Oz.

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Now hold up! She killed BOTH witches by accident. Does that still make her a hero?



She shows courage, loyalty, determination... that's pretty heroic. And the reason she kills the witches accidentally is because in addition to being a hero archetype, she's also connected to the archetype of the innocent child.

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You can do that?



Most great characters in movies and books are a combination of archetypes.

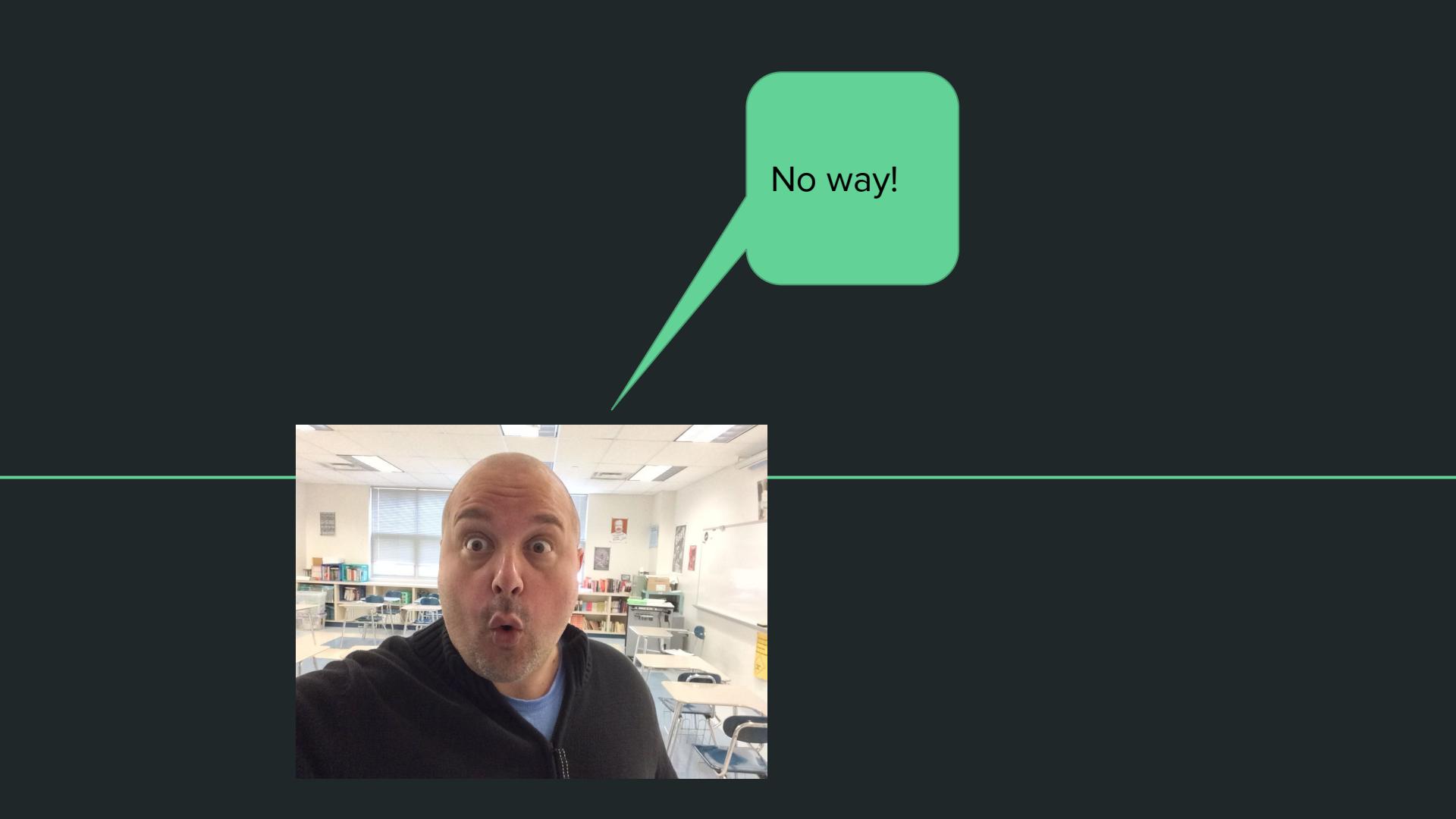
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So what other archetypes are there?

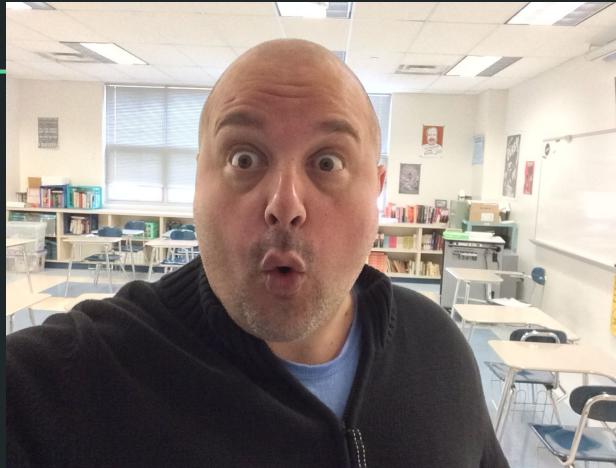


There are lots of archetypes. Too many to list them all here in fact!

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No way!

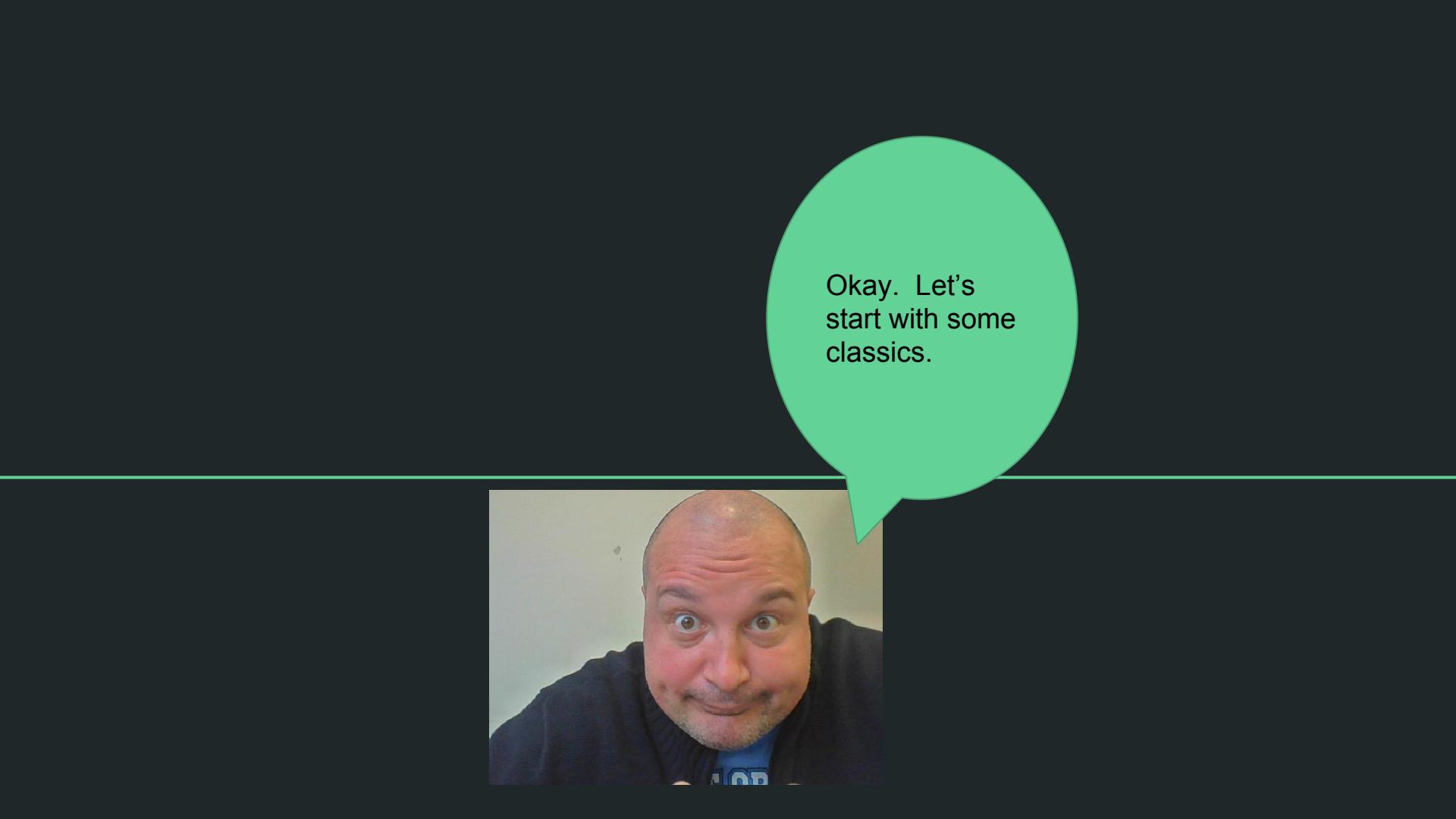


Way!

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But to get a sense of what archetypes are and of how they work in literature, we can look at a few of the most common ones and then think about how those same characters appear in other stories in different forms.

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Okay. Let's start with some classics.



Like Little Red  
Riding Hood!



Sure. Snow White and Cinderella are also part of that archetype.

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Check out my  
Snow White  
Impression.



Oh no!  
Poison  
Apple!





Don't quit your day job.

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This is my  
day job! I  
have a  
Master's  
Degree!



Anyhoo... Snow White, Red Riding Hood, Alice (Alice in Wonderland) are innocent (inexperienced and a little naive). Clever opponents can manipulate them because these innocent figures have not learned enough to know who to trust. In each case, learning this lesson is part of the story.

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If you think about it, heroic characters like Bilbo Baggins, Katniss Everdeen and Rey (Star Wars) are also innocent archetype figures.

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Other common archetypes are the mentor and the trickster.

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What are those?



Let's start with the mentor. A mentor is a person who helps the hero. Usually the mentor is older or at least more experienced, and gives the hero information and / or items to help the hero succeed.

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Good examples of the classic mentor archetype are Obi Wan Kenobi, Gandalf and Dumbledore.

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A photograph of a man with a bald head and a wide-eyed, surprised expression. He is wearing a dark t-shirt. A large, yellow, paper-cutout beard and mustache are attached to his chin, covering his mouth. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

So a mentor is  
an old guy with  
a beard?

That's true a lot of the time, but a mentor does not have to have a beard. It doesn't even have to be a man. Yoda, Crush (the sea turtle in Finding Nemo), Glinda The Good Witch of the North, the fairy godmothers from many fairy tales are all connected to the mentor archetype.

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HEY check this out! I just met this new teacher by the copy machine. He gave me this MAGIC STAPLER and all I had to do was trade him all my lesson plans.



Magic stapler? It sounds like you might have met up with the trickster archetype.

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The trickster is full of tricks and mischief. Some tricksters are basically good (or morally neutral) and they just like to cause trouble for fun or they need to use tricks to defend themselves.

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Bart Simpson, Bugs Bunny, Jack Sparrow, Odysseus. All these characters use tricks and disguises to outwit stronger opponents.

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There are evil tricksters also, who use their power to harm others.

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The most famous examples of evil tricksters are The Joker, the Riddler and Loki. Buddy / Syndrome from the Incredibles is another trickster as is Tolkien's famous character, Gollum.

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Another type of trickster is the shapeshifter. A character who transforms quickly, either physically or in their personality, into someone else.

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The Wolf-Man, Mystique (X-Men), The Incredible Hulk are all examples of the shape-shifter archetype.

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And the most powerful trickster archetype of all is Satan himself who, in many stories, uses tricks and changes his appearance to acquire souls.

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So this is  
just a  
piece of  
junk?



Not necessarily. Sometimes mentors act like tricksters as a way to test the hero. A classic example of this is when Luke Skywalker first meets Yoda. Luke is looking for a great Jedi master, but Yoda's appearance is deceiving. Yoda lets Luke believe he is just an annoying swamp creature to see how his prospective student will handle the situation and Luke fails the test because of his prejudices. Luke learns his first lesson from Yoda.

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When you write a story, consider using archetypes as you think about your characters and plots. Do a web search for archetypes and explore all these possibilities. Here are three to get you started. Incidentally, THREE is an archetype. Genies grant 3 wishes, Three bears, Three Musketeers, The Holy Trinity... even the Three Stooges.

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Archetypes as Literary Devices

Common Archetypes

12 Common Archetypes

# Happy Writing!

The magical  
stapler  
grabbed my  
nose!

