

What's the Problem?

Examining Conflict in Chinatown

GOAL

Use this lesson to understand conflict as a literary device that triggers action in a story.

OVERVIEW

This unit is appropriate for any ability level and applicable to lessons in language arts, creative writing, social sciences, communications and film studies.

Conflict is a problem or struggle in a story that triggers action. There are six basic types of conflict.

Person vs. Person: One character has a problem with one or more of the other characters.

Person vs. Society: A character has a problem with some element of society: the school, the law, the accepted way of doing things, etc..

Person vs. Self: A character has a problem deciding what to do in a particular situation.

Person vs. Nature: A character has a problem with some natural occurrence: a snowstorm, a forest, the bitter cold, or any other element of nature.

Person vs. Fate: A character has to battle what seems to be an uncontrollable problem. Whenever the problem seems to be a strange or unbelievable coincidence, fate can be considered the cause of the conflict.

Person vs. Machine: A character has to confront technology or other elements of human creation (as opposed to natural or divine creation).

METHODOLOGY

- Review the six basic types of literary conflicts in class.
- Introduce a conflict from "Now Chinatown" for students to consider and discuss in class.
- Ask students to identify the types of conflicts they think are represented in "Now Chinatown".
- Instruct students to write a five-paragraph essay about one of the types of conflicts they have identified. Review with students the elements of the five-paragraph essay (an opening paragraph with a thesis statement, three body paragraphs with specific facts to support the thesis statement, and a closing paragraph).

ADDITIONAL OPTIONS

- Using a dictionary or language arts textbook, instruct students to define several of the literary terms below and identify examples of each from "Now Chinatown".

