Types of Conflicts Found in Literature

Below is a list of possible conflicts found in literature. Select each conflict to learn more. To help you better understand each conflict and how it might be apparent, examples from popular culture have been provided. Please also note that it is possible for a text to have more than one conflict at work. The repeated references to conflicts in *The Simpsons* provide further context on how multiple conflicts might be present in a single work. Other examples of conflict are also provided.

Click on each type of conflict to learn more.

Individual versus Individual

Individual versus Nature

Individual versus Society

Individual versus Technology

Individual versus Self

Individual versus Individual (Kahn vs. Captain Kirk, Tom vs. Jerry)   Return

- Example: Homer Simpson's profound dislike of Ned Flanders in *The Simpsons* is unavoidably obvious. The two men are as different as night and day. Though Ned Flanders seems unaware that he is Homer Simpson's antagonist, to everyone who watches, it is obvious that Ned plays this role.

- Example: One of the funniest movies about individuals opposing each other is called *The Ref*, where a cat burglar gets caught in a house with a warring husband and wife. Other members of this dysfunctional family also add to the conflict. View The Ref *(1994) fan trailer* or explore the film on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB).

Individual versus Nature

- Example: One of the first episodes of *The Simpsons* features a hilarious scenario in which Homer takes the family camping in the woods. Things end disastrously for Homer and Bart, while Marge, Lisa, and Maggie successfully brave the wild. This episode has an interesting underlying argument at work about the relationship between humans today and nature.

- Example: Several books and movies show mountain climbers daring to scale the most formidable and highest mountains on earth where they face extremely difficult climates and terrain. These accounts are usually full of adventure, action, and hardship. Here is an example of human versus mountain in the video *Touching the Void Atheism*. You may also explore the article "Mt. Everest: Why do people keep climbing it?"

- Example: Many horror films feature scary and dangerous animals. One of the most popular movies of all time is Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. Watch *Crows Attack the Students - The Birds (6/11) Movie CLIP (1963) HD*.

- Example: One of the most famous American novels, *Moby Dick*, features Captain Ahab determined to kill the large white whale that took his leg.

Individual versus Society (*V for Vendetta, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, 1984*)

- Example: In *The Simpsons*, Homer has had infamously hilarious interactions with politicians. Mayor Quimby comes across as less than effective in his work. As a figure who represents the political system in *The Simpsons* universe, Quimby's portrayal makes an argument about the conflict between the individual and society. Additionally, the economics of the working-class Simpson family is often framed against the wealth of Mr. Burns, McBain, and other affluent figures.

- Example: A recent movie, *Belle*, is about a black woman brought up free in an aristocratic home during the years of slavery in England. The story features Belle, the protagonist, and a young lawyer engaged in challenging and ending the slave trade. Belle's struggle also involves challenging social conceptions of race. Watch the *Belle Trailer* to explore further.

Individual versus Technology (*2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Modern Times*, *The Fly*)

- Example: In *The Simpsons*, Homer is the safety technician at a nuclear power plant, but he is perpetually doing extremely dangerous things. The technology itself is portrayed as immensely complicated. Even in an animated sitcom like *The Simpsons*, the message about technology and the human being in our current era is multi-layered and complicated.

- Example: The best man versus technology movie ever (according to many) is *The Terminator*, which tells the story of a lethal robot sent back in time to murder the mother of the human army's leader. View the trailer *Terminator 1 Trailer 1984* or explore the Internet Movie Database (IMDB).

- Example: The novel *Frankenstein* can fit in this category since the monster is man-made and seeks to destroy its creator.

Individual versus Self (John Nash in *A Beautiful Mind*, Gregory House in *House*, Homer Simpson in *The Simpsons*, Hamlet in *Hamlet*)

- Example: In *The Simpsons*, Homer Simpson is perpetually at battle with himself—his eating habits, his drinking habits, his tendency toward laziness—you name it. He always acts against his own best interests.

- Example: In the movie *American History X*, Edward Norton plays a man who must confront his prejudices, which he does when he is sent to prison for murdering another man. The trailer, *American History X - Trailer - (1998) - HQ*, shows the character's personal transformation. You may also explore this further on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB).