THE ROLE OF THE ANTAGONIST IN LITERATURE
General Curriculum Outcomes (for Grade 12):

4- select, read, and view with understanding a range of literature, information, media and visual texts

8- use writing and other forms of representation to explore, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, feelings, experiences and learnings and to use their imaginations

Specific Curriculum Outcomes:

12.4.3- articulate their understanding of ways in which information texts are constructed for particular purposes

12.4.5- articulate their own processes and strategies in exploring, interpreting, and reflecting on sophisticated texts and task

12.8.2- use note-making strategies to reconstruct increasingly complex knowledge

12.8.3- make effective choices of language and techniques to enhance the impact of imaginative writing and other ways of representing

Context - This lesson plan is designed for a Grade 12 classroom. The unit plan is created for a four week period with five classes a week, one hour classes each. The students will use these four weeks to study the role of antagonists in literature and understand how this role is created, moulded and interpreted by the authors and the readers.

Teacher Goal - The goals for this unit plan are to encourage students to understand the development of literature, specifically looking at the role of the antagonist. Students will go through a series of activities that will help them learn how to create characters within the text, the role conflict plays in the text, how interpretation differs between readers, and the overall understanding of the formation of story.
Week 1: Conflict in Narrative

Monday

To begin our unit on antagonists, we will first be looking at conflict, which is an essential component to any narrative. Conflict is most visible between two or more characters, usually a protagonist and an antagonist/enemy/villain, but can occur in many different forms. Some key questions to cover include:

- What is conflict?
- Why is it important?
- Is a narrative limited to just one source of conflict?
- What do they think about when they think of conflict in the books they read, and the TV shows/movies they watch?

Next, we will outline the four main classifications of conflict. After each type is discussed, ask students to think of some examples of narratives where it can be found.

**Man Against Society:** "Man against society" type of conflict involves confronting authority, which often includes unjust governments, institutions, laws, traditions, or customs of one’s culture. This type of conflict applies to societal norms as well.

**Man Against Nature:** "Man against nature" conflict is an external struggle positioning the hero against a force of nature (such as a snowstorm or tornado) or wildlife (such as a shark or bear, or even some type of plant). It is also common in adventure stories, natural disaster movies and thrillers.

**Man Against Self:** With "man against self" conflict, the struggle is internal, against one’s own flaws. This internal enemy can include prejudices, doubts, greed, or other fatal flaws. A character must overcome his own nature or make a choice between two or more paths - good and evil; logic and emotion

**Man Against Man:** "Man against man" conflict involves stories where characters are against each other. This is an external conflict. The conflict may be direct opposition, as in a gunfight or a robbery, or it may be a more subtle conflict between the desires of two or more characters, as in a romance or a family dispute. This conflict manifests most obviously in the classic hero versus villain scenario.

These are the four most common types of conflict. If you wish to take the conversation further, you can also look into man vs. fate, man vs. machine (often referred to as technology), or man vs. supernatural.

To have students think more critically about this, have them break into groups of 2-3 to complete an exercise. Hand them out a sheet of paper with names of popular movies they would recognize, and have them decide what type of conflict fits the narratives best. Ask for a couple of sentences to back up their answers. You will probably get some different answers for some of these examples, so it will be interesting to compare responses as a class.
Activity:

*Mean Girls* (protagonist struggles with her self identity as she transitions from home school to public high school – man vs. self)

*Guardians of the Galaxy* (a group of space criminals must work together to stop the fanatical villain Ronan the Accuser from destroying the galaxy – man vs. man)

*The Wizard of Oz* (There are two obvious answers here: Dorothy struggles with the Wicked Witch of the West – man vs. man, but the Tornado could be seen as man vs. nature)

*Bridget Jones’s Diary* (the protagonist deals with her own neurosis and self-doubt – man vs. self)

*Charlotte’s Web* (Wilber the pig fights for his survival in a society that raises pigs for food – man vs. society)

*The Devil Wears Prada* (the protagonist works for an extremely rude, cynical boss – man vs. man)

*Twister* (this one is pretty self explanatory – man vs. nature)

*Lord of the Rings* (Sméagol battles his internal lust and greed, splitting into two dissociative identities: the weak Sméagol and the cruel Gollum- man vs. self)

*Jaws* (a monstrous shark wreaks terror on the oceanfront – man vs. nature)

*V for Vendetta* (V takes on the corrupt government of United Kingdom, which in the future has come under fascist rule – man vs. society)

*Shrek* (an ogre, who is an outcast in his society, has to follow the rules of the Lord of his kingdom in order to regain access to his swamp – man vs. society)

*Harry Potter* (there is a constant battle between the good and evil forces of the wizardry world – harry vs. Voldemort – man vs. man)

*How to Train Your Dragon* (the son of a Viking chief must capture a dragon in order to mark his passage into manhood and prove his worthiness to the tribe – man vs. society, he also has some conflict with his father, which could be considered man vs. man)

**Homework Assignment:**

Have students think about one of their own favourite movies, TV shows, comics, books etc. What type of conflict exists? Provide a couple of sentences explaining the context, and why that type of conflict is best suited.

**Tuesday**

Briefly reflect on yesterdays lesson, particularly man vs. man conflict. As mentioned, the most common form of this often presents itself as protagonist vs. antagonist, or hero vs. villain.
Ask students to write down what they already know about protagonists and antagonists in their binders. Once everyone has finished, provide them with these working definitions:

**Protagonist:** The protagonist is the main character in a story, novel, drama, or other literary work, and is the character that the reader or audience usually empathizes with. A protagonist is sometimes called a “hero” by the audience or readers.

Explain to the students that the protagonist is normally the hero, but could also be the person that the narrative is based around. This protagonist could be generally good, but could also do bad things. Ask students if they can come up with any examples of this (i.e. *Despicable Me*)

**Antagonist:** In literature, an antagonist is a character or a group of characters which stand in opposition to the protagonist or the main character. The term antagonist comes from Greek word “antagonistēs” that means opponent, competitor or rival. It is common to refer to an antagonist as a villain (the bad guy) against whom a hero (the good guy) fights in order to relieve himself or others.

Discuss how it is possible for one person to think that a certain character is the antagonist, but that someone else may choose someone else. Explain how there is usually a more obvious protagonist, but it is not always so clear with antagonists. As long as students can back up their decision with evidence from the text, their perception is correct.

**Class Brainstorm:** As a class, come up with typical characteristics that make a good protagonist/hero and a good antagonist/villain. Write down answers on chart paper or the board.

Next, we will shift our focus to the villain. Some question to ask include:

- What makes a villain distinct from a hero?
- What do villains typically look like?
- Is there a particular style of clothing, a particular color, or a particular “look” that sets a villain apart from a hero?
- Are these visual differences always clear-cut?
- Are the differences always physically detectable in antagonists, or is the line sometimes blurred?
  - If no, explain that maybe it’s an inner difference (in the hearts, minds, souls, etc.)
- What are the internal qualities that typically separate the hero and the villain?
- Ask students to think about the villains they’ve encountered in literature and movies. What made them the villain?

**Wednesday**

The class will watch some of the highlights from *Despicable Me*. As they watch, they are asked to keep a log of how the villain stereotype is both exemplified and challenged with internal and external qualities. Ask students to come to class tomorrow prepared with their notes, which will be collected.
Thursday

Have the class share their findings.

In this movie, although Gru is a “super villain”, he is also the protagonist and captures the hearts of viewers. Thinking back to Tuesday’s discussion on villains, there seems to be a certain stereotype they usually fit into. Gru’s character challenges some of those traditional stereotypes with characteristics such as:

- Showing attachment to others
- Friendliness
- Good intentions
- Having a sense of humour
- Morality
- Normalcy

In groups of 4-5, try to think of a few more examples of villains that step outside of their prescribed roles, and embody one or more of the traits listed above.

Another big stereotype is that the “villain” is a male role. However, that is not the case. Try and think of some female villains as a class. Some examples to get the ball rolling include:

- Viper - *Wolverine*
- Harley Quinn - *Batman*
- Mystique - *X-Men*
- Catwoman - *Batman*
- Cersei Lannister Baratheon - *Game of Thrones*
- Queen of Hearts – *Alice in Wonderland*

**Assignment:** For the rest of class, have students choose one of their favourite male super villains. As a creative writing assignment, students are asked to recreate that character as a woman. What would her name be? How would her wardrobe change? What about other external qualities (hair, facial features, makeup, etc.)? Would her powers change? What about her inner qualities (mind, heart and soul)?

Students are asked to provide answers to the questions listed above, a sketch of the character, as well as a brief write up of “a day in the life”. This assignment will be due in class on Monday.

Friday

To dig further into our discussions on villains, we will be touching on our society’s obsession with evil. You can start by outlining a few mainstream examples they may be familiar with. For example, *Breaking Bad*. Was their favourite character the one doing crime and breaking the law? Or did they prefer the DEA agent who was fighting against them? Another example is the Joker from *Batman*. This is a character who is depicted as a maniacal criminal mastermind who
terrorizes Gotham City and whose goal is to plunge it into anarchy. The Joker has been described as a “psychopathic, mass murdering, schizophrenic clown with zero empathy”, yet we love him.

Why is all that true? Why do we love the bad guy? The more interesting the bad guy, the more interesting the story. You don't have a story unless you have conflict, and the bad guy in most cases is the conflict.

**Activity: Villain in a Bag**

Bring 5 bags full of props into class. These props should be a combination of things that are reflective of the villain, and things that are not. If some items are too large, you can print off photos and include those. Some examples of props may include:

- Dark coloured clothing
- Makeup or face paint
- Tools
- A hat
- Random household items
- Rope

You and the students both have the ability to be very creative with your decisions.

As a group, students will have to create a villain, using the props to develop their character and story. For example, why do they wear a wide brim hat? Why do they carry around a magnet? The more creative, the better!

Have one student act as note taker, and another to act as the spokesperson. Leave time at the end of class for everyone to share their villains.

At the end of class, introduce *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, which will be discussed in the coming weeks. There are 13 books, which will be distributed evenly within the class. Students are asked to read their book independently, paying attention to details about the plot, the character development and how the story is unfolding.
Week 2: Character Development

Monday

Often powerful pieces of fiction have strong characters that the reader feels connected to and remembers long after reading the story. In this section we will explore the process behind creating strong characters. Throughout the week students will learn the process behind developing strong characters, and will have the opportunity to practice their creative writing skills to create their own villains.

Introduction to Character development

Lead a class discussion to get students to start thinking about why strong characters are an important part of writing a story. Ask the following questions to get the conversation flowing:

- Who are some of your favourite characters?
- Have you ever read a book where you felt you could really relate to the characters?
- Have you ever wished you were a character's best friend? Which character?
- Can you think of a character you despised? What didn't you like about them?
- Can you think of a character you were afraid of? What frightened you?

Ask students to brainstorm different character traits such as name, age, diction, style, etc. Write the ideas on the board and ask a student to record them for later use. At the end of the lesson, type up the list that the students have come up with, as this will be used for tomorrow’s homework assignment.

Ask students to write a journal entry about a character they wish they could meet in real life. Why did they choose this character? What would the meeting be like? What would they talk about? Would they get along? These are some ideas the students can work off of, but they can be as creative as they like with this assignment. Journals are for hand-in at the end of class.

Tuesday

Learning from the “prose”

BBC Harry Potter and Me: This video clip shows the many different techniques JK Rowling used in order to develop her characters. These include journal entries, drawings, lists, and more. Ask students to take note of the different types of techniques JK Rowling talks about using.

Distribute pages 108 - 112 of Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone (can be retrieved online). Ask students to read these pages independently and complete the following tasks:

- Underline words/phrases that inform us Snape's physical appearance
- Highlight words/phrases that inform us of his personality
- Circle words/phrases that inform us of his relationship with others

Question: Considering this passage only, do you think Snape is meant to be good or evil? What has influenced your thinking?
The object of this lesson is to draw attention to the word choices used to describe a villain.

**PotterMore:** If students have never read Harry Potter before, warn them of spoiler alerts and give them the option of starting the first book on the website. Ask them to pay attention to specific character traits that were discussed in the first lesson (appearance, personality, style, diction, etc). If students have read Harry Potter, allow them to explore the website. Ask students to take note of the amount of detail each character is given on PotterMore, and how much of this detail actually made it into the story. Students should recognize that much of the detail JK Rowling has given her characters never even made it into the books, but they nonetheless affected the characters’ development.

**Homework Activity:** Create your own villain. Using the typed up sheet from yesterday’s class of character traits, create your own villain.

**Example Template:**

NAME:

NICKNAME:

HEIGHT:

WEIGHT:

EYE COLOR:

HAIR COLOR:

PREFERRED STYLE (chic, bohemian, hipster, sporty, goth, skater, punk, or other):

FAMILY:

OTHER IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN LIFE (FRIENDS, SPOUSE, ETC):

HOBBIES:

SOCIAL STATUS:

FINANCIAL STATUS:

FEARS:

LIKES:

DISLIKES:

FAVORITE FOOD:

ALLERGIES:
SUPERPOWERS (optional)

*** The actual template used may not look like this, depending on what ideas the students came up with in the first day of the week.

**Wednesday**

**Using Social Media for Character development**

Have students create a Facebook Page for their favourite story villain. This can be a villain from a movie, book, comic book, or any other form of media the student chooses. If the computer lab cannot be booked for this assignment, teachers can provide a Facebook page template for students to fill out. The object of this assignment is to show students the many different aspects that go into creating a character with strong personality.

Once students have completed their Facebook pages, invite them to engage in an online discussion with their peers (playing the role of the villain they have chosen to present. The result should look something like an improvised play performed online. The object of this activity is to help students develop their imagination by further examining the role of diction in character development.

**Thursday**

**Wicked Fashion**

Brainstorm: What do villains usually wear? What colors? Do these colors symbolize anything? (Purple - regal/royalty, Red - power, blood, Black - evil, darkness)

**Poster Activity:** Using fabrics, magazine clippings, paint chips, comic book clippings, and newspaper articles create a poster board that provides a visual for a villain you are developing. Themes can be about a character trait (greedy, envious, power-hungry) or a fashion preference (hipster, goth, sassy). Students will use these posters for their final project of the week, which will be to create their own villain.

**Homework:** Using any materials from the week, compile a brief (five minute maximum) presentation of your villain. You can choose to either draw a picture of your villain, or write a brief description of your villain to share with your class. If students choose to do the latter, they are encouraged to think about word choice when writing their description, as discussed on day 2.

**Friday**

**Short Presentations**

- Give each student five minutes to talk about their villains to the class.
- Did any of the students have a favorite villain? What did they like about them? What worked, what didn’t work?
Week 3: Subjectivity within Text

Monday

Introduce the subject of interpretation and subjectivity within a text. Discuss with the students how every piece of literature is written from one perspective while there are multiple that can also be seen. This interpretation is going to be explored through the eyes of the antagonist in major stories explored in the class.

Use the example of *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* by Alexander T. Wolf. This book explains the Wolf’s side of the story in the incident when he “accidently” blows down the houses of two unfortunate pigs. The Wolf tries to redeem his name as he is actually a really great guy who is now treated with disdain. This story is an introduction to alternative interpretations.

Tuesday

This week will be strongly concentrated on writing. The students will pick one specific book from list:

- Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone
- The Hobbit
- The Return of the King
- A Series of Unfortunate Events #1
- The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe
- Matilda
- Peter Pan
- The Wizard of Oz
- Cinderella

**Activity:** Each student will be creating journals based from the perspective of the key antagonist in each story. This week will concentrate on their journal assignments. The journal will include at least four key events from the novel that includes the antagonist. These events will be rewritten from the point of view of the antagonist and show how there can be an alternative point of view.

Wednesday and Thursday

These two days will be devoted to their writing assignments. They will be given the opportunity to discuss their journal entries on both days with people doing the same books as them. They will be able to encourage one another in picking important scenes and seeing the different perspectives that each other has. Even within this discussion, the students will be able to see how perspective can differ when even looking from the same character’s point of view.
Friday

Today will be the final day for the character subjectivity. To give students a well-rounded view on multiple perspectives, the students will be discussing their journals. Each group will consist of only one person from each book. Students will be asked to read a couple of their entries as if they are that antagonist to show their other group members this new interpretation of the text. Each student will come out of this project with an understanding of different interpretations of different characters.

This project will tie well into the two previous activities. The first week discusses conflict, and this week’s project will rewrite many conflicts that drive the plots of the books they are in. The second week ties into character development which the students will need to have a deep understanding of when developing their own perspectives in their journals. The final week will wrap together all the subjects to bring forward the importance of the role of the antagonist in the text.
Week 4

Monday

Introduction to the plot within a story:

- Exposition: the character's daily life, up to the point of the incident which pushes them into conflict.

- Rising Action: normally the meatiest part of the story, where the character faces conflicts, struggles, pitfalls which trying to achieve their goals.

- Climax: the most important part – the point where it all seems to come to a head, it seems extremely impossible – the character has to decide if they want to win or fall gracefully. This is the turning point, where the conflict comes to a head.

- Falling Action: the aftermath of the conflict, the character's wins or losses, tying up the loose ends...

- Denouement: leading to a normal life, the new balance, the character could have a different perspective on things.

Activity:

Split up the class into groups of 3-4, assign one story per group. Look at all of the stories that have been learned throughout this unit such as Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, A Series of Unfortunate Events, The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, films such as Peter Pan, Cinderella, Matilda, The Wizard of Oz. Start to pick out the components that make up a plot within those stories and analyze them, see how they all make up a strong plot for a story. Have each group present to the class about what they have discovered – they can present from their desks or from the front of the class where they could use the board to write down what they have discovered.

Homework assignment:

With the characters that they have created earlier in this unit, have the students start brainstorming of a story that they would like to write about their characters, have them come in the next day with a draft of their ideas using the brainstorming techniques as well as explain to them of the plot diagram, have them write down brief ideas in the right sections of how they visualize their story unfolding.

Tuesday

Have all of the students split into groups of 3-4, start bouncing ideas off each other using the homework assignment of the plot diagram that they have completed, this should take about 20 minutes. Once their ideas are exchanged, they would be encouraged to start writing the story about their characters – the first draft. It would be a short story, including all of the techniques of the plot that was explained in the previous class. The writing portion would be individual work, helping them to find a way to get their story moving along.
**Homework assignment:**

Continue writing the story, at least try to wrap it up with their first draft so the teacher could read them and give feedback where necessary.

**Wednesday**

Shifting their focus from writing their stories, this would be a day where they get to discuss their favourite parts from the series *An Unfortunate Series of Events*. Arrange the students into groups accordingly, each student within the group should have a different book from the series.

**Activity:**

Have all of the students decide on their favourite scene from the book that they are reading, they should be aware about character development, the antagonist's development, how the plot is shaping the story and what the characters' reactions are towards the end. Have each student describe – or read a paragraph – from their favourite scene from the book, then start telling the other students about the development of the characters, antagonist and the plot.

If the students are finished with the activity before the class is over, allow them to continue working on their stories. The first draft with the feedback should be returned to the students so they can continue with their work.

**Thursday**

After the previous day, the students should be aware of each others' favourite scenes from whatever book they are reading from *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Group the students up into books that they are reading – at least two or three students should be reading the same book. Have them agree on a scene that they would like to play out to the class – have the class guess which scene it is from.

The students should be nearly finished with their story, wrapping up their final draft. Ensure that they have it completed for Friday.

**Friday**

Since the students have finished their stories, have a few students tell their stories to the class if they are comfortable enough with sharing their stories. Have the class give some feedback after the story is told, make sure that they are able to recognize the plot techniques and the points that make up a plot. If the students do not want to tell their stories to the entire class, they can pair up into groups of two or three and share their stories.