

Prompt:

*Eric Burdon once said, "Inside each of us, there is the seed of both good and evil. It's a constant struggle as to which one will win. And one cannot exist without the other." In many novels a character is trapped in a constant struggle between good and evil. Many authors use this conflict in order to provide depth and meaning to their novels. Therefore, consider a novel or play in which a character struggles with determining good from evil. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how an author uses the concepts of good and evil in order to provide a deeper meaning to the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.*

Hey Chase!

We missed you at school today. I like the topic of your prompt so far; we just need to get it more focused so that you don't end up with a 30-page essay. Here's what I would suggest:

1. See if you can find out the source of this quote. If you can't, that means it's an old saying/cliche, and you might consider finding a more original quotation (I'm sure there are plenty on this topic).
2. After the quotation, whether it's this one or another, put the quotation into your own words, perhaps tying it to literature.
3. In your final sentence or two, select a specific aspect of good and evil to analyze. For example, you could look solely at characters who defy/resist the classification of good vs. evil, or you could examine characters whom others perceive as evil, or you could look at characters whose good intentions are misinterpreted as evil by others. There are many more options for narrowing this down; I just wanted to give you a couple of examples.

Goodnight Moon

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie

Green Eggs and Ham

The Magic Treehouse

The Boxcar Children

The Chronicles of Narnia

The Hardy Boys

The Series of Unfortunate Events

Danny, the Champion of the World

The Great Gatsby

East of Eden

Beloved

The Chosen

The Crucible

The Hobbit

My Name is Asher Lev  
Beowulf  
Invisible Man

Outline:

**The Chronicles of Narnia-** This book has a **very straight forward image** of good and bad. In a biblical allusion, Edward joins the white witch and is going to be killed because of his wrong choice. However, the all-good Aslan steps in as a sacrifice for him. C.S. Lewis puts good and evil in black and white. There is only one way to be good and that is through Aslan.

**The Great Gatsby-** Jay Gatsby doesn't struggle with what is good or evil. He is self-absorbed and willing to lie in order to get what he wants. Ultimately, you could argue that his intense desire to live an extravagant lifestyle is somewhat evil and he pays the consequences for that. Fitzgerald is very **clear that you cannot change who you are**.

**East of Eden-** Perhaps the **most clear cut example of the struggle** between good and evil. Adam's son Caleb struggles with trying to be good when he knows he has Kathy's evil influence in his blood. Steinbeck claims that the point of all this struggle is "timshel" or thou mayest. Steinbeck argues that the characters are in a moral grey-area, but they always have the **choice** to be good or evil.

**My Name is Asher Lev-** In My Name is Asher Lev, Chaim Potok tells the tale of an extremely talented young artist. However, once his art begins to challenge the devout Jewish community he lives in, he faces backlash because what he is painting is seen as sinful. In a powerful image, he paints a picture of the crucifix. This leads to him being kicked out of his home for his artwork, and thus leaves the reader struggling to decide if Asher's art is evil or good. How can he be so talented, yet also so disrespectful to his heritage and family.

**Beloved-** In Beloved, the whole idea of **good and evil is twisted**. Sethe calls it love when she murders her daughter, Beloved. Yet, it is still murder. The fact that such a heinous crime is not only done out of love but also left unpunished is certainly a struggle and it is a struggle Sethe must deal with. When Beloved reincarnates, Sethe's guilt multiplies. She feels she must atone for her sin with Beloved. This ends up nearly destroying her. Thus, Morrison argues that it is best to leave the past in the past.

**Atonement-** Briony's awful sin and her search for atonement dominate this book. Yet again it is a grey area if Briony knew what she was doing. In fact, at her young age it is possible she did not know the consequences of her actions. Yet, it is also realistic that she knew exactly what she was doing. As Briony searches for atonement, she realizes she cannot find it. It does not exist for her. Therefore in her **moral grey area**, there is no atonement and no way to forgive your past.

- How do the characters struggle against the tides of good and evil? And how does the author portray the end of their struggle?
- Define good and evil. What does it mean to do good? What is evil? Bring in Beloved to show the ambiguity of what “love”, a good virtue, really is.
- Are there any clear-cut characters in the novels on the list? What can we learn from them?
  - Aslan in LWW is all-good. In fact he is an allusion to Jesus and therefore is not only all good, but is a sort of god figure.
  - Kathy in EoE is seemingly all evil. All she does is exploit for her own gain. However, the difference with her as opposed to Aslan is that she is not super-natural. She is human.
- How do morally ambiguous characters face a struggle between good and evil?
  - What about characters who ignore the struggle of good and evil?
    - Sethe never lets her past in to haunt her and she lives a meaningless, lonely existence.
    - Gatsby, in many ways is not concerned about evil. He just wants to be who he thinks Daisy wants him to be. The final result is destruction.
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  - What about characters who are worried about their struggle?
    - Cal in EoE is very concerned about the effect of evil on his life. However, despite this he still makes mistakes and lives in that moral grey area. Nothing is clear cut, but at least he finds meaning to his life at the end.
    - Briony in Atonement is bothered by her previous actions. She works hard to try and take back her evil, but finds that ultimately she can't.
    - Asher Lev is in a constant struggle between his art and his culture. Both are good yet combined they create evil. Asher is worried about his struggle but cannot reconcile it.
- What is ultimately the human condition in its battle between good and evil?
  - EoE- Timshel= thou mayest.
  - LWW- We need an supernatural force to save us.