

# Heroes and Villains, with Lorna Fergusson Worksheet

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*This is the worksheet for November's seminar, which you can find in video, audio and transcript forms at: [www.writershuddle.com/seminars/nov2013](http://www.writershuddle.com/seminars/nov2013).*

## Defining Terms

**Protagonist** = central character or principle actor

**Hero** = not just the central character but also special or exceptional in some way; someone we can look up to

**Antagonist** = a character (or force) that opposes the protagonist; can be impersonal

**Villain** = an antagonistic character with villainous characteristics

## Great, Memorable Heroes

Not just good looking or physically strong (though these can be important).

Crucial attribute: they're self-sacrificing, not selfish.

They're vulnerable (have moments of doubt). They may be flawed, with certain bad qualities, and could go as far as being anti-heroes.

## Great, Memorable Villains

Psychopathic characters (incapable of sympathy, guilt) can make very powerful villains. But even they can have redeeming features – e.g. think of Hannibal Lecter, who's learned and cultured.

Well-drawn villains have a backstory. They might be witty and/or charming, even seductive.

## Writing for Children

Nowadays, authors have more leeway in creating ambiguous characters – heroes who aren't perfectly good and villains who aren't perfectly bad. Obviously age group matters here: stories for very young children are often more black and white (like fairy stories).

Some villains in children's literature are seductive and glamorous – e.g. Mrs Coulter seems this way to Lyra at first in *Northern Lights*, and the White Witch to Edmund.

## Antiheroes: What Are They?

Antiheroes are flawed focal characters, ones who are at a midpoint between virtue and vice. Examples are Tom Ripley in *The Talented Mr Ripley*, Dexter Morgan in *Dexter*, and Tony Soprano in *The Sopranos*.

## Common Mistakes Writers Make

The main mistake with both heroes and villains is one of characterisation. Authors sometimes rely on stereotypes ("the world-weary detective"), fail to include backstory, and don't give the character a sense of progression – a character arc.

### Exercise

Think of three memorable heroes (from books, TV, etc) and three memorable villains. What made these characters stand out for you? Is there anything you can apply to your own writing?

Discuss this seminar here:

[www.writershuddle.com/forums/seminars/november-2013-heroes-and-villains](http://www.writershuddle.com/forums/seminars/november-2013-heroes-and-villains)