

# Lesson Skill: Identifying internal and external conflict

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**Strand** Reading--fiction

**SOL** 6.5  
7.5  
8.5

## Materials

- Copies of the attached Interior or Exterior Conflicts worksheet
- Sticky notes
- Short story

## Lesson

1. Brainstorm with students the types of conflicts or problems they face on a daily basis, and write their responses on the board.
2. Explain to students that there are two types of conflicts that people face every day:
  - **Internal conflict**, which takes place in a person's mind—for example, a struggle to make a decision or overcome a feeling. Internal conflicts are character vs. self.
  - **External conflict**, which generally takes place between a person and someone or something else, such as nature, another person or persons, or an event or situation. External conflicts may be character vs. character, character vs. nature, or character vs. society.

Tell students that characters in a story face the same types of conflicts, and it is important to identify them in order to understand the story completely.

3. Distribute copies of the "Interior or Exterior Conflicts" worksheet. Have students classify the conflicts as internal or external conflicts, writing the answers in the left column.
4. Go over the classifications with the class, and allow students to correct their answers as needed.
5. Give students copies of another worksheet showing a different set of interior and exterior conflicts, and have students classify them independently and hand in the completed worksheet for assessment.
6. Have students read a short story from their literature book and as they read, put sticky notes on the text wherever conflict is present.
7. When they have finished, ask students to identify the types of conflict they found in the story. Lead a class discussion of the ways the plot might have been different had internal conflicts been external or vice versa.

### Interior or Exterior Conflicts

Interior or Exterior	Conflict
	You love going to soccer practice every Friday night. However, last week you had to go to dinner with your family instead, and this week a friend has invited you to the movies.
	At a party, you spent a lot of time talking to a friend from your math class—just chatting. Now another classmate has spread rumors around school about the two of you.
	For the past month, you have been bullied on the school bus by older middle school guys. They typically call you names and sometimes even poke at you. Finally one day, you get fed up and scream, “Don’t ever touch me again!”
	You have a project due on Monday. Even though you have had several weeks to read, by Sunday night you’ve only read half the book. To make things worse, your teacher has stated, “I have high expectations for this assignment.”
	Your school has a state level ice-hockey team—for boys. When you and a group of girlfriends want to start a girls’ hockey program, you’re told that, although it’s a nice idea, there just isn’t enough money in the athletic budget.
	Although your friends say that you’re very attractive, you think just the opposite. You are overly critical about physical appearance.
	You think someone from your fifth period class is extremely cute! You’ve been trying to work up the nerve to ask him/her out, but you’re just too scared.
	Your dad is driving you and your friends to a big football game in town. Although you left in plenty of time, he seems to have lost his way. You think you saw the football field a couple of blocks back. When you tell your dad, he says, “Who’s driving—you or me?”