

Title: When Confidence is Really Just a Cheap Disguise

Synopsis:

In this blog post, we take a dive into the overused term "narcissist" - how it's thrown around like confetti for any and all annoying behaviors, yet it's a term that actually describes a deeply debilitating condition. Starting with a humorous dissection of how narcissism is misunderstood, we explore the true definition of narcissistic personality disorder, which involves a fragile shell of confidence masking a deep well of insecurity, anxiety, and self-hatred. The blog touches on how this dynamic plays out in both men and women, and the co-dependent relationship that often forms between the narcissist and their partner. Finally, we discuss how writers can tap into this concept to create a compelling and unlikeable antagonist, blending complexity with distaste.

The Snark's Blog: [here](#)

Discussion Questions

Use these questions to spark conversation and reflection in the classroom:

- Why do you think the term "narcissist" is often used incorrectly or as a catch-all for anyone who's difficult? How does this affect our understanding of the real psychological condition?
- In what ways does the contrast between the narcissist's outer confidence and inner insecurity affect their relationships? How might that play out in a story?
- What are some ethical considerations when writing a character with narcissistic traits? How can you avoid reducing them to stereotypes while still maintaining their complexity and role in the narrative?
- How might understanding the traits of a narcissist and their partner's role as a "caretaker" be useful for crafting a plot in fiction?

Writer's Prompts

Creative exercises to help students apply the themes of the topic:

- **Prompt 1: The Mask of Confidence.** Write a scene from the perspective of a narcissistic character as they confront a moment of vulnerability. How do they respond to a situation that cracks their confident exterior? How does their self-doubt creep in, and how do they mask it?
- **Prompt 2: The Narcissist's Deflection.** Write a scene where a narcissistic character is confronted with their flaws. Instead of acknowledging them, they deflect or manipulate the conversation. How do they turn the situation around to make the other person question their own actions?
- **Prompt 3: The Crisis of Confidence.** Imagine a scenario where the narcissist has a major failure - either personal or professional - that shatters their carefully constructed image. Write their internal monologue during this moment. Do they ever break? What do they do when they realize their world isn't as perfect as they thought?

- **Prompt 4: Self-Sabotage in Action.** Create a scene where a narcissistic character sabotages their own chance at happiness or success because their need for validation is greater than their ability to accept help or criticism. What leads them to make this decision?
- **Prompt 5: Mirror Reflection.** Write a scene where a narcissistic character is faced with a “mirror moment” when they realize the damage their behavior has done to themselves and others. How do they justify their actions, if at all? How do they handle the moment of clarity (if they do)?
- **Prompt 6: The Narcissist’s Charisma.** Write a scene where the narcissistic character is at their most charming. How do they manipulate a group of people or a single individual into thinking they are the most fascinating and insightful person in the room? What is the real cost of their charm?

Class Activities

These activities will help expand on the themes of the topic:

- **Group Discussion: “Narcissists in Fiction.”** Have students break into small groups and discuss examples of narcissistic characters in fiction. They should focus on how the characters’ behavior affects their relationships and the plot. Each group should share their findings, exploring whether the narcissists are depicted in a stereotypical manner or if they have more complexity.
- **Design Exercise: “Creating a Narcissist.”** Ask students to create a narcissistic character from scratch. They should define their character’s outward confidence, their inner insecurities, and the emotional vulnerabilities that lie underneath. Encourage students to think about how this character interacts with other characters - especially how they manipulate and control others.
- **Debate: “The Narcissist: Villain or Victim?”** Host a class debate on whether narcissistic characters should be depicted as purely villainous or if their actions and flaws should be seen through a more sympathetic lens. Split the class into two groups: one arguing that narcissists are simply misunderstood, and the other arguing that they are toxic villains deserving of our disdain.
- **Collaborative Story-Building: “Narcissists and Their Partners.”** As a class, build a collaborative short story in which the central conflict revolves around a narcissistic character and their co-dependent partner. What drives the narcissist’s behavior? How does the partner react to their constant emotional manipulation? How can the narcissist’s eventual downfall or growth be explored through the lens of their relationship?

Closing note from the blog’s writer, The Snark

Congratulations, dear writer! You’ve just spent time learning about narcissists, codependents, and the delicious, self-destructive drama they create. But let’s be real here - if you’re a writer, you’re probably not here just to get advice on how to write a “nice” character. You want to make readers squirm, and there’s no better way to do that than to put a narcissist on center stage.

Let's face it: we're all fascinated by people who wear a mask of confidence, only to have it crack when things get too real. It's like watching a beautiful, polished sculpture slowly crumble. And, yes, you can use that for your fiction. So, as you create that charming, utterly self-absorbed antagonist, remember that it's the contradictions in their behavior - the fragility of their strength - that will make them compelling.

Now, get out there and start writing those emotional trainwrecks of characters. The more mess, the better! If your readers aren't gasping, rolling their eyes, or cringing in secondhand embarrassment, you're doing it wrong. Because when it comes to writing, the more uncomfortable you can make people, the more memorable your characters will be. You're welcome.