

# Dilemma

## Definition of Dilemma

Dilemma is a Greek word that means “double proposition,” or “perplexing situation,” which presents two different possibilities, both of which seem practically acceptable. Dilemma is a rhetorical device in which a conflicting situation arises for a person to choose between right and wrong, where both seem of equal worth. Often times, dilemma involves an ethically wrong decision that may produce desirable outcomes, but which could have [moral](#) consequences. Or it involves a decision in which a person needs to choose one of the two options, both of which are equally good or bad.

## Examples of Dilemma in Literature

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### Example #1: *Hamlet* (By William Shakespeare)

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In the play *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare’s leading [character](#), Hamlet, struggles with a dilemma in how to out the orders of his father’s ghost to kill his stepfather; in order to exact revenge for marrying his mother, and usurping the throne. Ophelia also faces a dilemma in the play, as her brother and father believe that Hamlet is not faithful to her, and would rather use her; whereas her heart is convinced that Hamlet loves her. Neither of them could reconcile the situation following the ethical dilemmas they got entangled in.

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### Example #2: *Dr. Faustus* (By Christopher Marlowe)

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We find a perfect example of moral dilemma in Christopher Marlowe’s play, *Dr. Faustus*. His major moral dilemma is he desires to get extensive knowledge for his benefit, but intends to use it to exploit others. For this, he sells his soul to the representative of Mephistopheles. We see his moral

dilemma through his lust. He wishes to get things that were impossible to get, like power to rule an entire kingdom, but at heart he feels that he is doing wrong.

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### **Example #3: *Othello* (By William Shakespeare)**

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William Shakespeare uses several conflicts in his play, *Othello*, and one of them is person versus person. We find main the character, Othello, in a dilemma when he faces internal about [conflict](#) whether he should believe in Desdemona or not, and whether she is faithful to him or not. Othello trusts and loves her, until jealousy arises in him due to Iago's cruel manipulations.

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### **Example #4: *Jane Eyre* (By Charlotte Bronte)**

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Charlotte Bronte, in her novel *Jane Eyre*, demonstrates the characters struggling with their consciences after facing moral dilemmas. The most prominent characters are Rochester, Saint John, and Jane. While analyzing Saint John's character, we come to know that he is determined to devote his life as a missionary. He thus feels inclined to like the work ethics of Jane, and proposes to her.

Though John loves another girl, Rosamond Oliver, he cannot marry her, as she would not make as good a wife as a missionary would. Jane, on the other hand, also struggles with a dilemma when John tempts her. There is appeal to the life of a missionary, but then she refuses because she does not love John. Jane's second moral dilemma comes in the question of whether to marry Rochester or not, as he is already married to Bertha Mason. She finally resolves this one by marrying Rochester.

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### **Example #5: *Crime and Punishment* (By Fyodor Dostoyevsky)**

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In Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov commits a murder in order to test his assumption that some people have a right to act in this way because they are capable of doing such things. Raskolnikov tries several times to justify his actions, and mentally compares himself with Napoleon Bonaparte, determining that murder is

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### Example #6: *Oedipus Rex* (By Sophocles)

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Sophocles raises moral dilemma in his phenomenal play *Oedipus Rex*, in which he falls victim to a great [tragedy](#) when he sets out to discover the truth of his birth. He seeks the truth with the expectation that, after knowing the truth, he would be able to set things right in his city. However, we learn that despite his righteous intentions, everything proves to be a trauma for him. He faces the dilemma of relieving the people from plague, or leaving it to save himself.

### Function of Dilemma

In literature, dilemma is a struggle occurring within the mind of a character. Therefore, it gives readers an insight into characters' lives. There may be a single or multiple dilemmas in a story. However, the purpose is to create a tension and complexity in a [narrative](#) by adding confusing and conflicting ideas. It also creates [suspense](#) and excitement in the story from the beginning to the end. Simply put, the leading characters have to struggle, evolve, and make choices in a story to change effectively.