

The Literary Tragic Hero

In order to be classified as a literary Tragic Hero, a character must conform to the following criteria:

✓ **Noble or Privileged Birth**

In classic literature, this typically meant the character is of a royal bloodline or monarchy. In a more modern context, it could mean the character is born to a family of political or social power or wealth.

✓ **Good Intentions**

The character initially exhibits the qualities of compassion and kindness. He/She recognizes the suffering of those around and wishes to alleviate their hardships.

✓ **Tragic Flaw**

A character trait that brings about tremendous suffering.

Most often, the tragic flaw is HUBRIS; excessive pride.

A tragic flaw is NOT the same thing as an error in judgement or a fatal mistake.

(Ex. Oedipus' tragic flaw was *not* the fact that he unwittingly killed his father and married his mother. Rather, his character flaw was his hubris; the excessive pride that compelled him to ignore the wise advice and logic of those around him and depend upon his own stubborn belief in his opinions. He thought himself *too good to be told*.)

✓ **Downfall**

As a result of the character's tragic flaw, he/she begins to lose everything that he/she holds dear: family, power, title, wealth, respect of the common people, life.

✓ **Epiphany**

The moment of realization when the character recognizes their own hubris and is remorseful. Unfortunately, the epiphany comes too late to avert the downfall.

* Because of the character's initial good intentions and their final epiphany and remorse, the reader or audience feels pity for the character.