

# Archetypes

Archetype means the first-ever example or universal example. Carl Jung, a student of Sigmund Freud, developed his own idea of the collective unconscious. Jung said that there are certain archetypal ideas that show up due to shared cultural experiences, sometimes in otherwise-unconnected societies. Certain settings and character types appear in Asian, African, European and North/South American cultures without these societies sharing ideas. Something primitive and inherent lies within each of us: the collective unconscious.

## Archetypal Characters (an incomplete list)

- Beautiful enchantress a woman who has “power” over men (see femme fatale)
- Blind seer physically blind (or blind to what’s going on around him/her) but can “see” the truth or the future
- Christ-figure self-sacrificing, good with kids, may perform “miracles”
- Crone/witch/hag old, wise, infertile, life-cycles (especially death, literal or figurative)
- Damsel in distress
- Earth Mother fertility, birth
- Everyman ordinary guy who represents every “man”
- Femme fatale woman who causes great disaster, often the destruction of men
- Gentle Giant monster/monstrous-looking human but with a kind heart, often not smart
- Guide: usually a spiritual guide (See crone & wise old man)
- Healer: provides physical, mental and/or spiritual healing for another character; usually there is more to it than mere medicine (often the healer is a wounded healer, able to cure others but not himself)
- King: the top male, often either benevolent or cruel, may not take kindly to being advised; strongly associated with concepts of right and wrong, in law or morality
- Knight/ Warrior: chivalric, loyal, gets the job done, honorable, protects the princess
- Lady Luck female personification of luck or fortune; sometimes lady luck likes you, but she’s fickle
- Lady of the Hearth associated with the home, nurturing and hospitality
- Mentor/wise old man
- Naïve young man from the country
- Respected arbiter typically a woman who acts as a judge or peace-maker
- Shadow represents negative attributes the reader or hero represses or would like to eliminate in themselves. The shadow can appear as a separate character, an antagonist, usually, and is a worthy opponent of the hero. Not necessarily a villain.
- Shapeshifter his/her alliances and personality change often, keeping the hero and reader guessing; often a romantic interest for the protagonist
- Sidekick: loyal and supportive, often bound to the hero and often weaker or lesser than hero
- Sovereign queen
- Spear maiden a warrior woman, or a determined, focused woman, a “fighter”
- Spring maiden woman associated with new life, spring, and youth
- Threshold guardian/ Gatekeeper tests the hero before letting him or her “through”
- Trickster works for either hero or villain; often humorous and lightens the mood; puts wit against the powerful or strong (and often wins)
- Wild Woman a woman who lives outside society and in union with nature, often associated with creativity, instinct and feeling (as opposed to intellect or reason)
- Wise fool on the surface seems foolish or discreditable, but speaks or reveals the truth or

wisdom

## Archetypal Settings (an incomplete list)

castle	the king's power
deserts	spiritual quest
forest	old wisdom, being lost, the unconscious
garden	Eden/paradise, innocence, unspoiled beauty
maze	a journey into ourselves before rejoining the world
river	death and rebirth, time into eternity
sea/ocean	subconscious, death and rebirth, eternity
threshold (gateway)	a test or obstacle, a rite of passage, a stage on a journey
tower	power, safety, shelter, stability
underground (like caves)	confronting fears and one's true self
wasteland	infertility, impotence, sinfulness, the failure of the ruler(s)
wilderness	soul-searching, meditation, tests

## Archetypal Objects (an incomplete list)

Apples	knowledge, freedom, choice
Bridge	Communication, union, or a passage – a rite of passage or a test, even.
Circle	Wholeness, unity, oneness
Colors	red = passion, blue = water, green = fertility, vegetation, etc.
Egg	Fertility
Female and Male symbols (yonic and phallic)	ex. a valley (yonic) or a spear (phallic)
Fire	Destruction, heat, purification, knowledge
Knot	Continuity, binding, or, when undone, freedom.
Lion	Bravery
(Red) Rose	(Romantic) love
Serpent, worm, dragon	evil, corruption, healing energy
Sun	Creative energy, birth (sunrise) or death (sunset), enlightenment
Tree	Center of the world, origin of sacred power, life and knowledge
Water	Purification/redemption, life and death

## Archetypal Situations & Topics (an incomplete list)

Deal with the devil	Quest
Droughts or Floods	Rescuing a maiden
Forbidden love/ Star-crossed lovers	
Journey & return from the afterlife/ Resurrection	

**ARCHETYPE:** An original model or pattern from which other later copies are made, especially a character, an action, or situation that seems to represent common patterns of human life. Often, archetypes include a symbol, a theme, a setting, or a character that some critics think have a common meaning in an entire culture, or even the entire human race. These images have particular emotional resonance and power. Archetypes recur in different times and places in myth, literature, folklore, fairy tales, dreams, artwork, and religious rituals. Using the comparative anthropological work of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, the psychologist Carl Jung theorized that the archetype originates in the [collective unconscious](#) of mankind, i.e., the shared experiences of a race or culture, such as birth, death, love, family life, and struggles to survive and grow up. These would be expressed in the subconscious of an individual who would recreate them in myths, dreams, and literature. Examples of archetypes found cross-culturally include the following:

(1) ***Recurring symbolic situations*** (such as the orphaned prince or the lost chieftain's son raised ignorant of his heritage until he is rediscovered by his parents, or the damsel in distress rescued from a hideous monster by a handsome young man who later marries the girl. Also, the long journey, the difficult quest or search, the catalog of difficult tasks, the pursuit of revenge, the descent into the underworld, redemptive rituals, fertility rites, the great flood, the End of the World),

(2) ***Recurring themes*** (such as the [Faustian bargain](#); pride preceding a fall; the inevitable nature of death, fate, or punishment; blindness; madness; taboos such as forbidden love, patricide, or incest),

(3) **Recurring characters** (such as witches as ugly crones who cannibalize children, lame blacksmiths of preternatural skill, womanizing Don Juans, the hunted man, the *femme fatale*, the snob, the social climber, the wise old man as mentor or teacher, star-crossed lovers; the caring mother-figure, the helpless little old lady, the stern father-figure, the guilt-ridden figure searching for redemption, the braggart, the young star-crossed lovers, the bully, the villain in black, the oracle or prophet, the mad scientist, the underdog who emerges victorious, the mourning widow or women in lamentation),

(4) **Symbolic colors** (green as a symbol for life, vegetation, or summer; blue as a symbol for water or tranquility; white or black as a symbol of purity; or red as a symbol of blood, fire, or passion) and so on.

(5) **Recurring images** (such as blood, water, pregnancy, ashes, cleanness, dirtiness, caverns, [phallic symbols](#), [yonic symbols](#), the ruined tower, the rose, the lion, the snake, the eagle, the hanged man, the dying god that rises again, the feast or banquet, the fall from a great height).

The study of these archetypes in literature is known as [archetypal criticism](#) or **mythic criticism**. Archetypes are also called **universal symbols**. Contrast with [private symbol](#).

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