Foil Definition

In literature, a foil is a [character](https://literarydevices.net/character/) that shows qualities that are in [contrast](https://literarydevices.net/contrast/) with the qualities of another character. The objective is to highlight the traits of the other character. The term *foil*, though generally being applied to a contrasting character, may also be used for any [comparison](https://literarydevices.net/comparison/) that is drawn to portray a difference between two things.

What we observe in literature very often is that a foil is a secondary character who contrasts with the major character to enhance the importance of the major character. The etymology of the term *foil* testifies the aforementioned [assertion](https://literarydevices.net/assertion/) as the word is taken from the practice of backing gems with foil (tool), so that they shine more brightly.

Examples of Foil in Literature

Example #1: *Paradise Lost* (By John Milton)

Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Book I, is based on the comparison of two contrasting characters: God and Satan. Satan, in the entire work, appears as a foil to God. The negative traits of Satan and the positive traits of God are frequently compared, which consequently brings to the surface not only the contrast between the two characters, but also “justify the ways of God…” We reach a conclusion that it is only just for Satan to be expelled from the paradise because of his refusal to give in to the will of God.

Example #2: *Julius Caesar* (By William Shakespeare)

Foil examples are also found in plays. We notice in William Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar* a twofold foil. Cassius is a foil to Brutus, and Brutus is a foil to Antony. Both Cassius and Brutus conspire to kill Caesar, but Cassius is more prone to treachery than Brutus is, and thus easily gives in to his evil ambition.

Brutus, on the other hand, hesitates to join the plot without careful analysis of the whole scenario. Cassius even goes to the extent that he does not shy away from writing phony letters to convince Brutus to join the plot. Brutus, in contrast, is bent on relying on his own reason, and his awareness of his dignified obligations as a Roman, to do the inevitable. Moreover, Brutus is a foil to Antony because Brutus’s honesty and simplicity are in clear contrast to Antony’s qualities of deception and over-ambition