



The Fictional 100: Ranking the Most Influential Characters in World Literature and Legend

Ph.D Lucy Pollard-Gott

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Some of the most influential and interesting people in the world are fictional. Sherlock Holmes, Huck Finn, Pinocchio, Anna Karenina, Genji, and Superman, to name a few, may not have walked the Earth (or flown, in Superman's case), but they certainly stride through our lives. They influence us personally: as childhood friends, catalysts to our dreams, or even fantasy lovers. Peruvian author and presidential candidate Mario Vargas Llosa, for one, confessed to a lifelong passion for Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Characters can change the world. Witness the impact of Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich*, in exposing the conditions of the Soviet Gulag, or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom*, in arousing anti-slavery feeling in America. Words such as quixotic, oedipal, and herculean show how fictional characters permeate our language.

This list of the Fictional 100 ranks the most influential fictional persons in world literature and legend, from all time periods and from all over the world, ranging from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* [1] to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* [100]. By tracing characters' varied incarnations in literature, art, music, and film, we gain a sense of their shape-shifting potential in the culture at large. Although not of flesh and blood, fictional characters have a life and history of their own. Meet these diverse and fascinating people. From the brash Hercules to the troubled Holden Caulfield, from the menacing plots of *Medea* to the misguided schemes of *Don Quixote*, The Fictional 100 runs the gamut of heroes and villains, young and old, saints and sinners. Ponder them, fall in love with them, learn from their stories the varieties of human experience--let them live in you.

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