

Name: _____ Class: _____

Alter Egos

By CommonLit Staff
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Can a person have two selves? Beyoncé is also known as Sasha Fierce; Clark Kent, the newspaper reporter, transforms into Superman. The idea that a person can have “another self” is a relatively new concept. As you read about the concept of the alter ego, consider how it relates to identity.

“Alter Egos” Explained

- [1] Alter ego is Latin for “the other I.” It refers to a person’s second self or identity that is different from a person’s normal personality. A person who has an alter ego is said to lead a double life. Alter ego is also used to refer to the different behaviors any person may display in certain situations.



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The idea that people could have “another self” was first recognized in the 1790s. Franz Anton Mesmer, a German doctor, used hypnosis to separate his alter ego. Under hypnosis, Mesmer showed a behavior pattern that diverged from the personality he had in his waking state. It was as if a completely distinct character had developed in the altered state of consciousness,¹ but in the same body.

Alter Egos in Popular Culture

Alter egos are used by numerous performing artists who use stage personas, which are different from stage names, both to entertain audiences and to explore new identities for themselves. The chart below shows some alter egos in popular culture:

Name	Stage Name	Alter Ego
Elvis Presley	The King of Rock and Roll	Jesse Garon
Destiny Cyrus	Miley Cyrus	Hannah Montana (pop star secret identity) and Miley Ray Stewart (normal teenage girl)
Beyoncé Knowles	Beyoncé	Sasha Fierce

Professional wrestlers, more often than not, perform under ring names depicting their alter egos, such as Terry Bollea (Hulk Hogan), Mark Calaway (The Undertaker), and Paul Levesque (Triple H).

1. the state of being awake and aware

Alter Egos in Literature

- [5] In literary analysis, the term alter ego sometimes refers to characters in different works who are psychologically similar, or a fictional character whose behavior, speech, or thoughts intentionally represent those of the author.

In one famous work of literature by Robert Louis Stevenson called the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the author used the idea of an alter ego to demonstrate the concept that good and evil can exist simultaneously within one person, constantly at war with one another. In the novel, Edward Hyde represents the doctor's other self, a psychopath who does not conform to civilized society, and who shares a body with the doctor.

Since this book was published, the names "Jekyll and Hyde" have become synonymous with a split personality, or an alter ego that becomes capable of overpowering the original self.

Alter Egos in Comic Books

In old comic books, superheroes and their secret identities are often considered alter egos. The archetypal comic book hero, Superman, takes on the identity of the "mild-mannered" newspaper reporter Clark Kent in order to live among the citizens of Metropolis without making people suspicious.

Batman is a character created by Bruce Wayne in order to disguise himself for the purposes of fighting crime. The Batman comics and movies have also explored the theme of the true self becoming lost in the alter ego, much like the plot of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

- [10] In the *Incredible Hulk* comic book series, Bruce Banner loses control to the Hyde-like Hulk whenever he becomes angry, yet also depends upon the Hulk's super powers in order to combat villains. In later Batman comics and movies, the villain is Harvey "Two Face" Dent. Sometimes, he is Harvey Dent, the clean-cut lawyer of Gotham City; other times, he is Two-Face, a ruthless monster who uses his dual-faced coin to determine who lives and dies.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which quotation best expresses the central idea of the text?
 - A. "A person who has an alter ego is said to lead a double life." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "In literary analysis, the term alter ego sometimes refers to characters in different works who are psychologically similar, or a fictional character whose behavior, speech, or thoughts intentionally represent those of the author." (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "...the idea of an alter ego [demonstrates] the concept that good and evil can exist simultaneously within one person, constantly at war with one another." (Paragraph 6)
 - D. "The archetypal comic book hero, Superman, takes on the identity of the "mild-mannered" newspaper reporter Clark Kent in order to live among the citizens of Metropolis without making people suspicious." (Paragraph 8)

2. How does the explanation of the origin of the term "alter ego" help explain its later use in popular culture and literature?

3. PART A: What does the word "diverged" mean as it is used in paragraph 2?
 - A. Differed
 - B. Imagined
 - C. Spread out
 - D. Linked together

4. PART B: Which phrase provides the best support for the answer to Part A?
 - A. "in his waking state"
 - B. "completely distinct"
 - C. "altered state of consciousness"
 - D. "in the same body"

5. What is the likely purpose of the chart included on page 1?
- A. To make the text more engaging by introducing topics more relevant to readers.
 - B. To provide familiar examples of well-known alter egos in order to help illustrate the term's meaning.
 - C. To suggest that most entertainers have alter egos, although we may not be aware of it.
 - D. To clarify the difference between fictional alter egos and real ones.

