



# Symbols & Motifs

7th Grade Literature/Language Arts



# Definition:

A symbol is an object that stands for itself *and* a greater idea.

# Why Use Symbols?



- Give a deeper meaning to objects, events, relationships, etc.
- Add depth, complexity, layers, and interest to a story

# A Personal Symbol

- If you could represent yourself with one object, what would it be?
- Bring this object to class on \_\_\_\_\_
- If it's too large, snap a picture
- Yes, it's a grade

*See examples in Symbolism Slideshow*

# A Personal Symbol: Example

I see the world in pictures.

I think the world is beautiful, even when others don't.

I look for the details, evaluate angles, and how to take a picture that is out of the ordinary.

I love to relive memories by looking at old photographs.



# A Personal Symbol: Example

A wallflower is be the best object to describe me. I am usually quite shy and don't participate in activities. I am usually afraid that I may say stupid things, but I say them anyway. Also, I am pretty sensitive. I am just like a wallflower that sticks to the walls and needs to be drawn out.



# A Personal Symbol: Example

It's fun like me.

It's a great pass time.

When it bounces, it represents my life with its ups and downs.

You can get a lot of friends by sharing it.

You'd fight for it with others which will teach you relationships.



# A Personal Symbol: Example

I am like the Jack in the Box  
because I can think outside the  
box.

I may seem ordinary, but I am full  
of surprises.

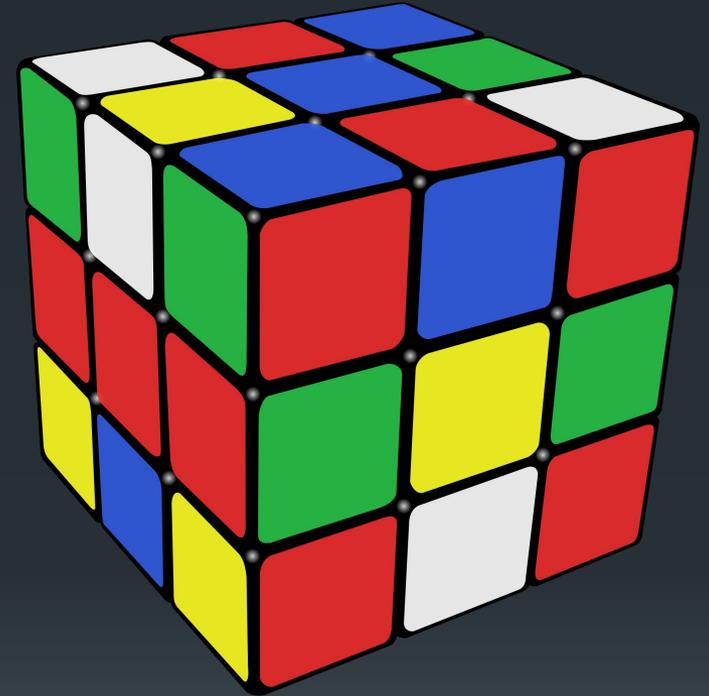
I am not afraid to speak my mind  
or stand out in a crowd.



# A Personal Symbol: Example

I am like a rubik's cube because I'm intensely annoying, but once I am understood, I know I am likeable.

I am a puzzle and hard to figure out at first.



# Finding a Personal Symbol

- Give it time: think about it as you walk home, eat dinner, etc.
- Look for the little things in your room
- What means a great deal to you?
- Think symbolically... what represents/defines you? WHY?
- **Bad examples:**
  - iPhone
  - Starbucks drink
  - Puppy
  - Expensive jewelry
  - A Swiss Army knife ← suspension/expulsion from school

- **Good examples:**

- Guitar pick
- Puzzle piece
- Swim goggles
- Headphones



# Colors

- Each color has symbolism

## White:

- Purity
- Peace
- Innocence
- Love
- Clarity



## Red:

- Love
- Anger
- Emotion
- Violence (blood)

## Yellow:

- A kidnapper in a short story wears a yellow coat that symbolizes .
- Danger
- Warning

# Color Symbolism

- **Red:** impulse, strength, fire, warning, anxiety, anger, danger, hatred, war, sin, bloodshed, power, love, passion, generosity
- **Yellow:** happiness, lightness, joy, excitement, peace, intensity, warmth, wealth, fire
- **Blue:** coldness, sadness, depression, soothing, calmness, relaxation, heaven
- **Green:** hope, fertility, birth, nature, spring, nature, creativity, rejuvenation/renewal, brightness, calmness/tranquility, money, strength, longevity, immortality, life
- **Purple:** clarity, deliberate action, passion, reason, love, wisdom, secrecy
- **Orange:** danger, warning, unfaithfulness, happiness
- **Brown:** dirt, earth, life, worthlessness, old, unpleasant, impurity, disgusting
- **Gray:** depression, dullness, boredom, coldness, harshness, ashes, indecisiveness
- **Black:** death, famine, misfortune, mourning, guilt, being lost, chaos, confusion, disorder, melancholy, pessimism, depression, classy, eternal, insecure, evil, fear, nothingness, unconsciousness
- **White:** clarity, peace, innocence/purity, hope, emptiness, holiness/religion, love (weddings), rite of passage (wedding, first communion, christening), silence, ghosts, surrender, snow

# Nature

- **Seasons:**
  - Spring: rebirth, renewal, new beginning
- **Plants/Flowers:**
  - Weeds: evil, wildness, outcasts of society
- **Trees:**
  - Apple tree: temptation; loss of innocence



# Animals

- **Lion:**
  - A solar symbol; power, pride
- **Owl:**
  - Wisdom
- **Cat:**
  - Serpent of the underworld, cunning, forethought, & ingenuity



# Weather/Time

- **Fog/mist:**
  - Prevents clear vision/thinking; isolation; confusion, mystery, the unknown; a prelude to an important revelation
- **Morning/Sunrise:**
  - The beginning of when all is uncorrupted; purity & promise
- **Thunder:**
  - Voice of God or gods; warning; anger, wrath



# Metals/Gems

## ■ Rubies:

- Good fortune; banishes sorrow & wards off evil spirits

## ■ Sapphires:

- Contemplation; purity

## ■ Silver:

- Relates to the moon, to water, & the female principle; symbolizes the object of all desires and the harm they cause

## ■ Gold:

- The perfect metal; a reflection of heavenly light; it suggest the sun-fertility, wealth, dominion; it is a male principle



# Direction



## ■ East:

- Land of birth/rebirth; of the Sun and Venus; renewal, youth, feasting, song, & love

## ■ North:

- symbolizes night sky and night wind and is the home of the Moon and the Milky Way; coldness, alienation, and hostility; it is the abode of death

## ■ South:

- Is the side that lies on the Sun's left hand and is the hand of fire; represents warmth, comfort

## ■ West:

- Is the land of evening, old age, and the

# Other

- **Names:**

- ?

- **Water:**

- Washes away guilt; origin of life; cleansing

- **Landscapes:**

- Mountain: overcoming obstacles/challenges

- **People:**

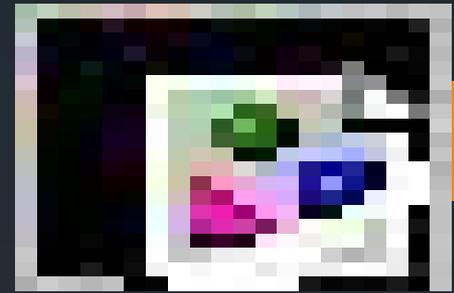
- Baby: new beginning, rebirth; life

- **Mythical Creatures:**

- Cupid: love

- **Actions:**

- Learning to swim: freedom; independence

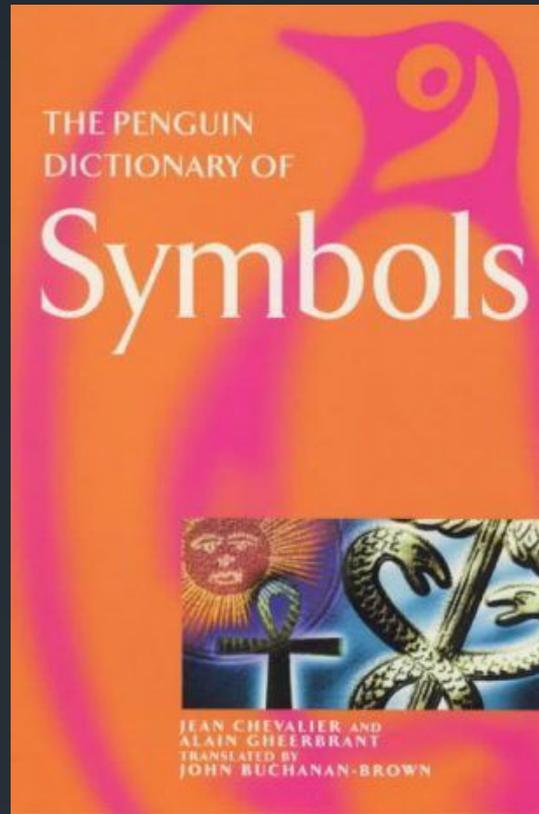


# Other

- **Numbers:**
  - 7 is lucky; 13 is unlucky
- **River:**
  - fluidity of life; stream of life & death
- **Moon:**
  - Changing & returning shape; feminine symbol
- **Sun:**
  - source of light; heat & life; a masculine symbol
- **Mythical Creatures:**
  - Cupid: love
- **Actions:**



Need  
more  
symbols?



# Motif

A motif is a recurring object, concept, or structure in a work of literature, film, etc.



## Why use a motif?

- Writers constantly repeat it to represent a dominant central idea/theme
- Readers can interpret the work more accurately
- What kind of motifs you could use in YOUR fairy tale?

# Symbol vs. Motif



A symbol can help in the understanding of an idea or thing in the story, while a motif can help indicate what the literary work or piece is all about.

# Motif



AP English Literature and Composition Terms | MOTIFS | 60second Recap®



0:00 / 1:16



YouTube



# Modern Literature Example:

## *The Hunger Games: Fire*

- Represents Katniss
  - Characteristics of a fire: feisty, dangerous, unexpected
  - Rebellion
  - Incompliance

Supports theme: Rebellion is necessary for change.



# Film Example:

*Sixth Sense* = the color red



• According to director M Night Shyamalan, in *The Sixth Sense* the color red is used to symbolize anything in the real world that had been tainted or touched by the "other" world, or the world of the dead.



# Film Examples:

*The Lord of the Rings* = the ring

*A Christmas Carol* = money



# Add Symbolism to Your Writing:

## STEP 1

- Determine the purpose of the symbol.
- Story about death = symbols that will best represent the ideas of death and dying.



# Add Symbolism to Your Writing:

## STEP 2

- **Set up the relationship between the symbol and the character and/or plot of your story. Introduce the symbol in such a way that subtly enhances the story's meaning.**
- **For instance, the budding of a tree might symbolize a character's maturation from childhood to adulthood.**

# Add Symbolism to Your Writing:

## STEP 3

- Use symbols sparingly. Symbols are effective only when necessary.
- A good key to know when to introduce and re-introduce a symbol is whether it affects the plot of your story or when it triggers an important aspect of your character's emotional development.
- For instance, the budding tree symbol can be introduced whenever there is a shift in time: "That spring, it was underneath the full bloom of the plum tree in her father's yard, that Beverly began flirting with the Clancy boy."

# Add Symbolism to Your Writing:

## STEP 4

- **Introduce or reintroduce a powerful symbol during the climax or epiphany of your story.**
- **For instance, the tree in the yard might symbolize a marriage. A couple fears their marriage is falling apart. At the end of the story, a terrible storm blows through and the couple fears the tree might topple and crash into their home. But the tree survives stronger than ever. The tree's survival thus becomes symbolic of the survival of the couple's marriage.**

# Add Symbolism to Your Writing:

## STEP 5

- **Avoid clichés.** If the symbol is too obvious, your reader will be distracted and become disengaged.
- **Choose symbols that are new and inventive or go against the grain of your readers' expectations.**



Questions?

# Homework:

Find a motif in your independent reading book.

Be ready to share next week!

