

# Symbolism



"In the spring I asked the daisies  
If his words were true,  
And the clever, clear-eyed daisies  
Always knew."

In Sara Teasdale's "Wild Assters" spring and daisies  
symbolise youth. Brown fields and autumn symbolise  
advancing age and the approach of winter (death).

## What is it?

Symbolism refers to when an **object, item, word, symbol** has a **deeper meaning** most often symbolising or representing something else (i.e. **ideas** or **qualities**). For example, the use of a dove in literature can symbolise the notion of peace or something else (e.g. *love* or *purity*).

Symbols are **even more powerful than words** because they represent **rich meanings**, ideas, emotions and events throughout history and within peoples' lives. They can also be **universal**, recognised by all cultures, or **local**, only recognisable to people within a particular group (i.e. the rose signifies love in Western culture)

Examples of symbols and their *possible* meanings within Western culture:

| Symbol                     | Meaning               | Symbol            | Meaning                     |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>broken heart</i>        | emotional pain        | <i>donkey</i>     | obstinate                   |
| <i>apple</i>               | temptation            | <i>fox</i>        | unreliable                  |
| <i>pitchfork</i>           | hard work             | <i>rat</i>        | thief                       |
| <i>rainbow</i>             | hope                  | <i>scale</i>      | justice                     |
| <i>horse</i>               | reliability           | <i>eagle</i>      | freedom                     |
| <i>Mars</i>                | aggression, war       | <i>Iron/steel</i> | strength, invulnerability   |
| <i>White</i>               | innocence/purity      | <i>Black</i>      | evil/death                  |
| <i>Ring (band of gold)</i> | faithfulness/fidelity | <i>Moon</i>       | loneliness, unrequited love |

## Symbolism question card

Now that you have read the information card on **Symbolism**, it is time to practice what you have learnt.

- 1 Copy the following table and write each **symbol's** intended meaning.

| Symbol               | Meaning | Symbol           | Meaning |
|----------------------|---------|------------------|---------|
| <i>Snake</i>         |         | <i>Chain</i>     |         |
| <i>Broken mirror</i> |         | <i>Forest</i>    |         |
| <i>Light</i>         |         | <i>Sunflower</i> |         |

- 2 Read the following poem and write an interpretation of each of the following **symbols**: *Rose*, *worm*, *storm*, *night* and *bed*.

### "The sick rose"

O Rose, thou art sick!  
The Invisible worm  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm,  
Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy,  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.