

LESSON

7

Which Is the Most Important Symbol in *The Great Gatsby*?

KEY CONCEPT: Symbolism

KEY SKILLS: Identifying the use of symbolism and imagery in a text

Citing textual evidence

Determining the figurative and connotative meanings of words

Analysing the development of themes or ideas in a text

Comparing and contrasting

Evaluating arguments



Which Is the Most Important Symbol in *The Great Gatsby*?



OVERVIEW:

This lesson will enhance your students' knowledge and understanding of the use and effects of symbolism in *The Great Gatsby*. It is important for your students to be familiar with the novel prior to this activity.

KEY CONCEPT:

Symbolism

KEY WORDS:

Symbolism, symbol, sign, character, mark, letter, hieroglyphic, ideogram, emblem, token, representation, figure, image, shape, badge, allegory and motif.

LEARNING INTENTION:

To understand the importance of symbolism in *The Great Gatsby*.

SUCCESS CRITERIA:

We can do the following:

- Identify and explore the connections between familiar symbols we may encounter in society today.
- Examine and discuss the key uses of symbolism in *The Great Gatsby*.
- Rank and judge the importance of key symbols in the text.
- Decide which is the most important symbol, using evidence from the text to justify our views.

STRATEGIES USED:

Sorting and Classifying

Diamond Ranking

1. IDENTIFY IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

Some of the key areas to investigate within and around the concept of 'symbolism' are the following:

- Colour
- Motifs
- Metaphor
- Themes
- Allegory
- Wealth
- Poverty
- Aspirations
- The American Dream

2. CHALLENGE STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT

Here are some examples of cognitive conflict we expect your students to experience:

Opinion	Conflicting Opinion
Symbols are an effective way of communicating the meaning of something.	Symbols are not an effective way of communicating if everyone doesn't have a shared understanding of what they mean.
Symbols have universal meanings that everyone can understand.	Symbols shift their meanings depending on the context they are used in. For example, a chain can be symbolic of union or imprisonment.
Words are used to convey either symbolic or literal meaning.	Words can possess a symbolic meaning and a literal meaning simultaneously. For example, a pun or a euphemism can have both a literal and a symbolic meaning at the same time.
Symbolism enhances fiction for the reader by building richness and adding depth to the narrative.	Symbolism does not enhance fiction for the reader if they do not understand the symbolic nature of the text.
Symbolism relates to literature and is a device used by authors to enhance their writing.	Symbolism is an aspect of our everyday life and language usage.

Questions for Challenge

- What is symbolism?
- What makes something symbolic?
- What is a symbol?
- How do we know what a symbol is?
- Why do we use symbols?
- How do we use symbols?
- When do we use symbols?
- How do we rely on symbols?
- How reliable are symbols?
- What if there weren't symbols in our everyday life?
- Can we live without symbols?
- How important is symbolism as a literary device?
- How much is the symbolic meaning of something dependent upon individual perception?
- How much is the symbolic meaning of something dependent upon its context?
- Does everything have a symbolic meaning if we look hard enough for it?
- Is it possible to communicate without symbols?
- Is it possible for a symbol to have just one meaning?
- When does something or someone become symbolic?
- What makes symbols important?
- Who decides if something is a symbol?
- Why do we see symbols in areas such as advertising, literature and film?
- Why do writers use symbolism? How does it help their writing?
- What is the difference between a symbol and a metaphor?
- What is the difference between symbolism and imagery?
- What is the difference between a symbol and a motif?
- What is the difference between symbolism and allegory?



Download the activity cards at
[http://resources.corwin.com/
learningchallengelessons](http://resources.corwin.com/learningchallengelessons)

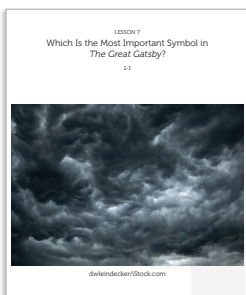


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Activity 1: Provoke the Discussion Through Sorting and Classifying

Get your students to work in groups of no more than four. Give each group a set of the **Activity 1 resource cards***. Ask your students to sort the symbols or the symbolism represented on the cards into categories. They will need to decide upon the criteria for this.

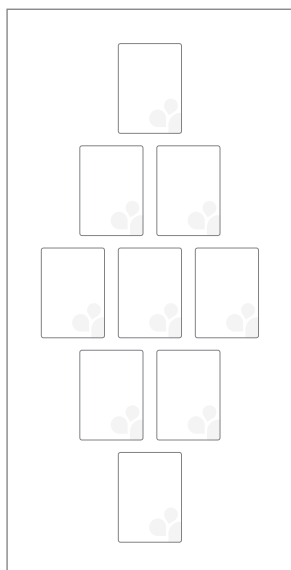
Your students should be able to clearly identify what connects each of the cards in each of the sets they create. They should also be invited to allow the sets to become *Venn Diagram* in character if they find that there is the need for this.

Remember to stop the groups and ask them to compare their thinking, reasoning and organisation.

*It would be beneficial to add a selection of commercial symbols to this activity.

3. CONSTRUCT UNDERSTANDING

Activity 2: Diamond Ranking



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Which Is the Most Important Symbol in
The Great Gatsby?

Daisy Buchanan

She embodies the daisy flower, which is fragile but also grows wild. She is a fragile person who can't make up her own mind. The daisy has a golden yellow centre surrounded by white petals, symbolising her outward purity and innocence but morally corrupt core.

The Diamond Ranking strategy encourages active participation. It will help your students to prioritise information, clarify their thoughts and create reasons and reflections.

Using the **Activity 2 resource cards**, your students must choose nine of the symbols and/or examples of symbolism from *The Great Gatsby* and rank them according to their importance in the novel.

Your students can add their own examples of symbolism from the novel to the set to be ranked.

Encourage your students to move around the classroom to explore, discuss and challenge the ranking structures created by other groups.

Questions to Promote Further Dialogue

- What makes one symbol more important than another?
- Which symbol aids the development of the plot most? Does this make it more important than other symbols?
- Should a key character be more important as a symbol than a setting, an action or an event?
- Should the most important symbol be the most powerful?
- Is the most frequently used symbol the same as the most important symbol?
- Does the number of connections a symbol has to characters, parts of the plot and settings increase its importance?
- Are the more complex examples of symbolism more important than the more simplistic and obvious examples?
- What is the link between the impact of the symbolism on the reader's enjoyment of the novel and its importance?

Adaptation

Provide additional support for students by reading through the cards and defining difficult terms.

Limit the number of cards the students are interacting with in **Activity 1**.

Provide images for the symbols in **Activity 2**.

Extension

Ask your students to find extra examples of symbols and symbolism in the novel in addition to those already provided.

Treat the activity title as an essay question and ask your students to create a response individually or in pairs. Use this as an opportunity for peer assessment and feedback.

4. CONSIDER THE LEARNING JOURNEY

At the end of the activity it is usual to encourage the students to review their learning journey and the thinking process they have engaged in throughout the session.

This can include reflection on the thinking that has taken place to this point and a summary and conclusion of the new understanding reached.

Explicit reference to Learning Intentions and Success Criteria is a good starting point for this reflection, but it is also helpful to return to and re-examine some key questions:

- Do you have a deeper or better understanding of the concept of 'symbolism'?
- Which parts of the lesson helped you to decide and/or change your knowledge and understanding of symbolism?
- What questions do you still have?
- What would you like to investigate further?
- Which is the most important symbol in *The Great Gatsby*?

Ideas for Transfer

Ask your students to explore the use of symbolism in advertising and brands, exploring and identifying the most popular and the most important to us today.

Challenge your students to create a piece of descriptive writing around a chosen symbol. They could use ideas from *The Great Gatsby* such as lights and colours.

WWW – What Worked Well . . .

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EBI – Even Better If . . .

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