

Materials:

- PowerPoint (saved to Google Drive)
- Copies of poems

Objectives:

- Understand the roles of imagery and symbolism
- Understand a few of the ways in which poets can use symbols (romantics, modernists, postmodernists)
- Begin to analyze and interpret symbols in poetry

➤Display Powerpoint**Imagery:**

- Uses language to represent objects, people, actions, settings, and ideas
- Appeals to one (or more) of our 5 senses

Examples:

What images do you see?

What senses do these images appeal to?

Symbolism:

- Descriptions that give the object, people, settings, etc. meanings that go beyond the literal
- The meaning of the symbol is typically dependent on the context
- Symbols can suggest important themes, motifs, and character traits

Archetypal Symbols:

- Universal symbols that have common meanings
- Evoke ideas or feelings that are common to the human experience

Skull: symbol of death Dove: symbol of peace

Can you think of any other archetypal symbols? (water=purity; river=time; red=passion; snake=evil)

Other symbols:

- Other symbols are more abstract
- No commonly accepted meaning
- Reader needs to use context to interpret the meaning
- Different readers can read symbols differently

Sunflower example:

What might the sunflower represent? (life, hope, spring, etc.)

Image v. symbol

- Does the author seem to emphasize a particular image or come back to it frequently?
- Does the image remind you of anything else or evoke a certain feeling?
- Is the description of the image strictly “necessary” to understanding the text?

How poets use symbols and imagery

➤Pass out copies of poems

Listen as I read the poems aloud; think about the images; try to imagine them in your mind

Read:

My Heart Leaps Up

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man;

So be it when I shall grow old,

Or let me die!

The Child is father of the Man;

And I could wish my days to be

Bound each to each by natural piety.

- **What is the main image here?** (rainbow)
- **Thinking back to our strategies for determining if something is symbolic, does the rainbow seem to have symbolic meaning?** (yes)
- The rainbow is an archetypal symbol
- **What do we commonly associate rainbows with?** (hope)

Read:

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.

- **What is the main image here?** (rose)
- **Are there any other images?** (worm)
- The symbols in this poem aren't really archetypes; roses can be used to symbolize a variety of different things, or sometimes just be images.
- **Do they seem like symbols here?** (yes)
- **What might the rose and worm symbolize?** (life and death, beauty and disease, love and heartache, etc.)

The Romantic Poets

- Used art as an expression of the mystical/divine
- Relied heavily on symbolism
- Particular interest in archetypal symbols (particularly with regard to beauty and death)

Read:

The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

- **What images are in this poem?** (wheelbarrow, rain, chickens?)
- **Looking at the context, do you think the images are symbolic?** (no)

The Modernists

- Believed traditional art forms were obsolete
- Experimented with form
- Drew attention to the process of creation
- "The Red Wheelbarrow" focuses on objective description
 - The poem's form and its meaning are the same
 - Images are beautiful and worthy subjects without being imbued with symbolic meaning

Read:

Litany

You are the bread and the knife,
the crystal goblet and the wine.
You are the dew on the morning grass
and the burning wheel of the sun.
You are the white apron of the baker,
and the marsh birds suddenly in flight.

However, you are not the wind in the orchard,
the plums on the counter,
or the house of cards.
And you are certainly not the pine-scented air.
There is just no way that you are the pine-scented air.

It is possible that you are the fish under the bridge,
maybe even the pigeon on the general's head,
but you are not even close
to being the field of cornflowers at dusk.

And a quick look in the mirror will show
that you are neither the boots in the corner
nor the boat asleep in its boathouse.

It might interest you to know,
speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world,
that I am the sound of rain on the roof.

I also happen to be the shooting star,
the evening paper blowing down an alley
and the basket of chestnuts on the kitchen table.

I am also the moon in the trees
and the blind woman's tea cup.
But don't worry, I'm not the bread and the knife.
You are still the bread and the knife.
You will always be the bread and the knife,
not to mention the crystal goblet and--somehow--the wine.

- **There's a lot to unpack here, so let's focus just on the first stanza; what images do we see?** (bread and knife, crystal goblet and wine, dew on grass, sun, apron on baker, birds flying)
- **Now, let's focus just on the first line: you are the bread and the knife. Does anyone know what literary device this is?** (metaphor)
- **Just about every line in this poem presents a metaphor; metaphors usually have some sort of meaning. Does the bread and knife metaphor seem to have a symbolic meaning based on the context?** (no; because everything is a metaphor, there really is no context)

The Postmodernists:

- Outright rejection of the methods of previous eras
- Often treat these ideas with sarcasm or irony
- "Litany" uses images sarcastically
 - Deliberately forms them as metaphors to suggest symbolism, but the meaning is impossible to interpret
 - The overwhelming number of images is meant to create a feeling of confusion in the reader, taking aim at the "arduous" task of interpreting symbolism

Questions?

Homework: obviously I can't enforce it, but since I'm pretending to be your teacher, I'll give it to you anyway.

Instructions: Analyze the images and symbols in the poem (it was written by a non-professional poet that I know, so there's no chance of looking it up on the internet to find interpretations!)

Write one paragraph examining the following questions:

-What images do you see in the poem?

-Are any of the images symbolic? What evidence in the poem suggests this?

-If so, what do they represent/suggest?

-Are they archetypal symbols or more open to interpretation?

-If the images are not symbolic, why not? Is the author using images in a way more akin to Williams/Collins?