

Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of a visual or verbal cue to represent something else; can communicate an idea, action, object, or emotion.

How Elements of Art Convey Meaning

- **Balance:** use of space; distribution of visual weight; symmetrical or asymmetrical
- **Color:** color evokes emotion
 - Warm colors (red, orange, yellow): anger, excitement, heat
 - Cool colors (blue, green, violet): calm, comfort, nurture, cool
 - Black: unknown, death, disease, mystery, bad
 - Blue: spirit, pure, virtue,
 - Brown: earthiness, wholesomeness, simplicity, friendliness
 - Green: nature, growth, environment, envy, new, youth, go
 - Gold: wealth, enrichment, religion, enlightenment, sun
 - Gray: depression, sadness, loneliness, conservative
 - Purple: royalty, bravery, sacred
 - Red: danger, passion, violence, anger, blood, aggression, speed, love, stop
 - White: purity, innocence, soft
 - Yellow: joy, sun, happiness, excitement, remembrance
- **Blank space:** awkward empty or blank space in composition may mean that someone or something is missing or lacking; opposite, overly filled space eludes to chaos
- **Texture:** in painting, texture can be visually perceived or physical. For example, brush strokes on a painting can inform viewer of emotions behind image
 - Thick or heavy texture allude to passion or intensity of subject
 - Smooth textured compositions appear more controlled and static

Common Symbols in Art and Literature

- **Animals**
 - Bird: freedom, spirit
 - Dog: loyalty, companionship
 - Dove: purity, love, peace
 - Fish: symbol of Jesus Christ
 - Goat: devil, evil, scapegoat
 - Lamb: purity, Christ (also could be seen as a sheep = mindless follower)
 - Lion: royalty, strength
 - Rabbit: fertility
 - Sheep: mindless follower
 - Squirrel: hyper, restless



• **Nature**

Clouds/fog: obscured truth, uncertainty

Fire: passion, life symbol, spirit, immortality

Hills: problems, challenge

Light: truth, knowledge, spirit

Moon: female symbol

Mountains: strength, overbearing

River: passing time, change

Snow: purity

Sun: male symbol, royalty, life, strength

Tree: life or death, depending upon whether tree is depicted with or without leaves

Valleys: emotional lows



• **Objects**

Bell: freedom

Candles: memory (in memory of ...), prayer, hope

 Birthday candles: life, growth, mortality

Clover: luck

Eye: all-seeing truth

Flag: patriotism, representation of corresponding country

Hand: help, friendship

Heart: love

Ribbon: remembrance

School: education

Skull: death

Snake: evil

Statues

 Statue of Liberty: United States of America, independence, freedom

 Venus: beauty

Yin-yang: balance of forces



• **Seasons: times in a person's life**

Autumn: time of contemplation, peace, nearing old age

Spring: birth

Summer: youth, vitality

Winter: old age, death

