

# Symbolism:

*meanings beyond the obvious*

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Discovery Honors English

# A symbol is...

Any object that stands for itself *and* a greater idea. We see symbols every day...



Which of these images stand for universal, abstract ideas?  
What are those ideas?



# In literature, symbolism...

...creates a **direct, meaningful link** between

a specific object, scene, character, or event



and



abstract ideas, values, or ways of life.

# Symbolism is used to...

## 1. Provide meaning beyond the obvious

- Emphasize key ideas or themes
- Connect fictional events to real-world situations
- Relate specific details or characters to universal themes



A river can represent the flow of life...

...or its bends may represent the unknown.

The water might signify purity...

...or dangerous currents.

# Symbolism is used to...

## 2. Draw attention to the plot

A walk into a tunnel could show movement from good to evil.



An approaching storm shows a shift in the plot, heightened intensity, or trouble approaching



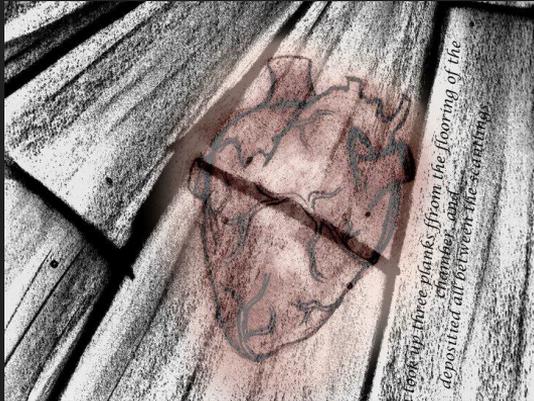
Dawn can show the end of a conflict or the start of a new direction in the story.



# Symbolism is used to...

## 3. Give insights into characters

In Poe's "The Tell Tale Heart," the sound of the beating heart represents the man's guilt.



A character's name can be telling. In "The Lottery", Mr. Graves has authority over the killings.

And appearance can be symbolic; Lennie's great size alludes to his uncontrollable power.



# How can you spot a symbol?

There's no one way, so look for:

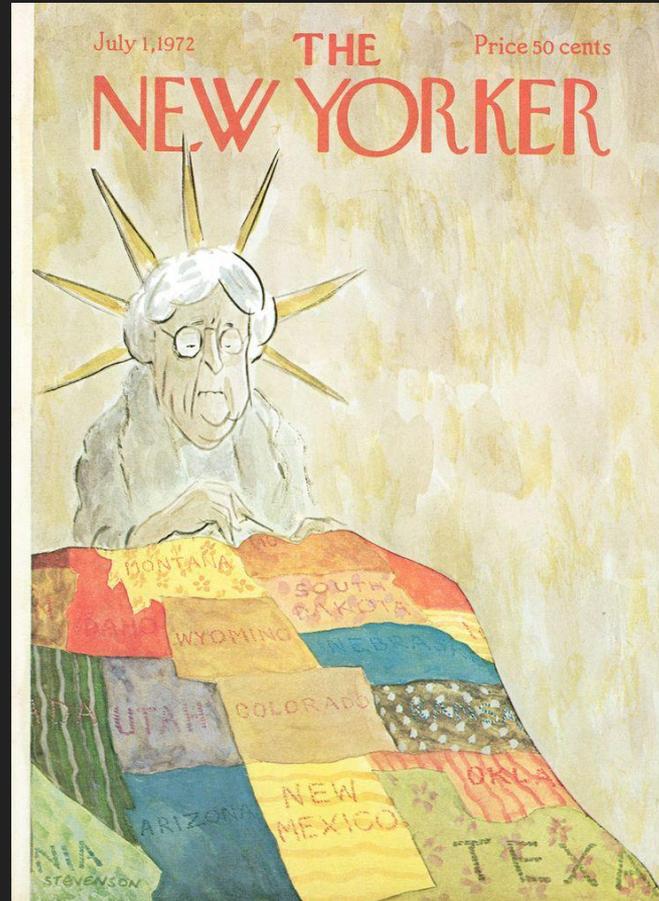
- repetition
- universal colors (red for passion, green for nature, yellow for youth, blue for calm, etc.)
- unusual names
- objects/creatures that have cultural meanings (owls, lions, etc.)

# One point of caution

Interpretation can go 'way off the script'; you may lead yourself into seeing symbols that the author never intended.

Make sure that your interpretations can hold up consistently throughout the story.

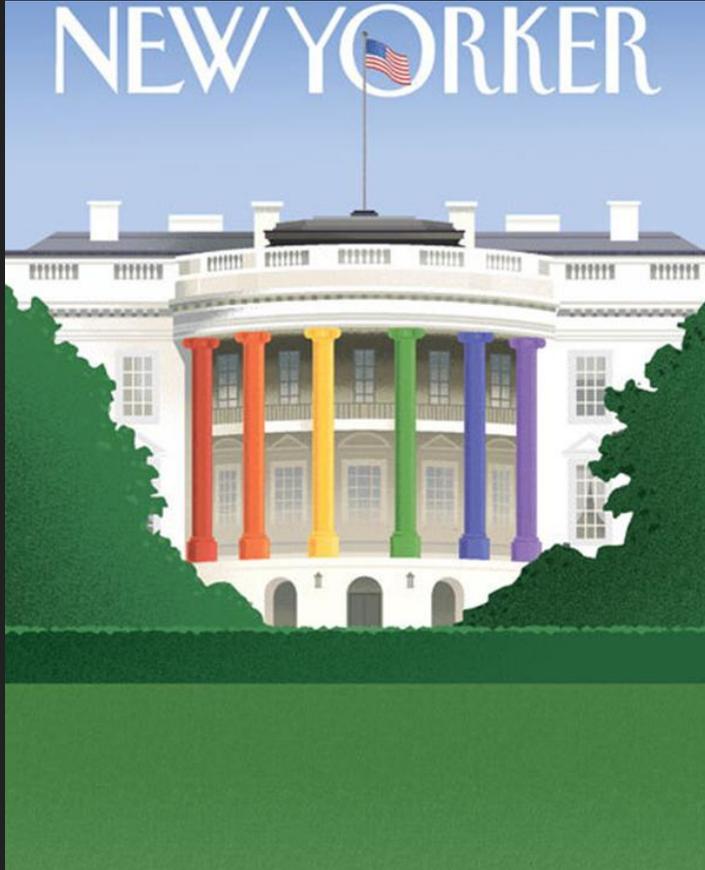
# What do these images symbolize?



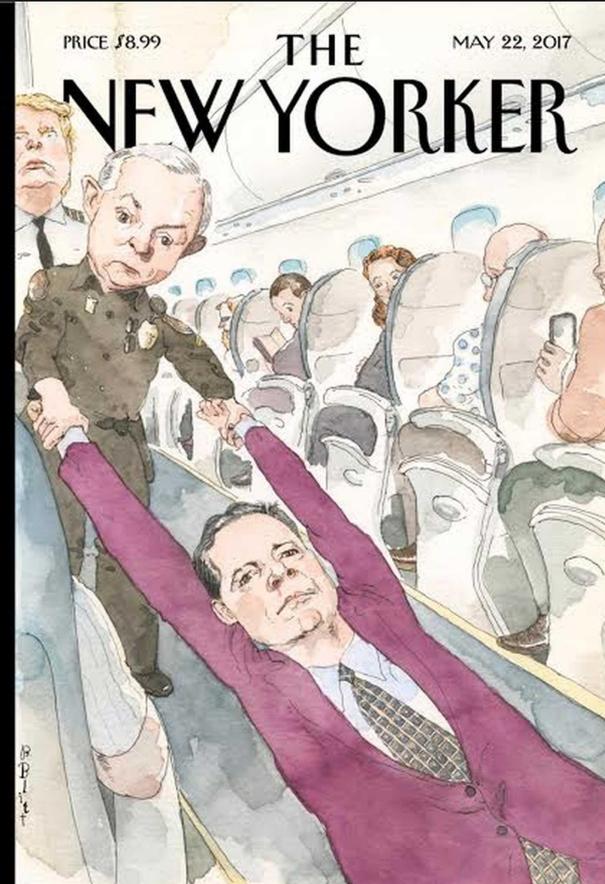
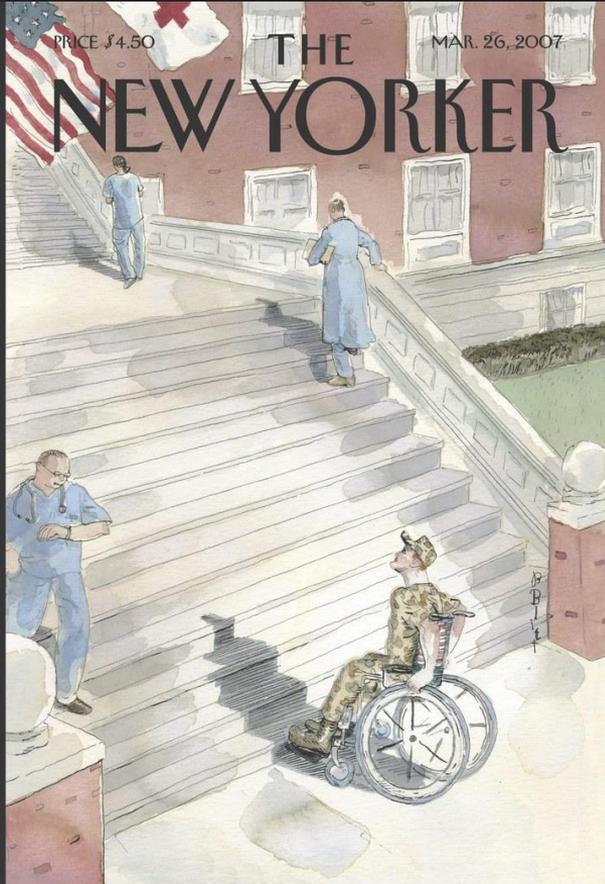
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How about this?



# How about this?



- old age seeming 'worthless'
- loss of awareness
- incapability
- 'worth' measured as usefulness
- companionship as contrast to isolation/loneliness
- others?

# Remember:

1. start with literal meaning
2. explain one clear, obvious connection/representation within the story
3. explain connections to the world at the time of the story
4. explain connections to universal human experiences

## For Wednesday:

1. review the three passages/examples you are going to focus on in your essay
2. think clearly about what the symbolism is (other events/characters, bigger aspirations/issues, universal human experiences)
3. copy at least two quotes (with p.#) to use for each passage/example
4. bring your book to class -- we'll return them at the start of the block

## For Friday:

Type your essay (12pt Times font, 1.5 spacing) & bring a printed copy to class

# Grading:

50% structure (organization, correct grammar/spelling, consistent integration of quotes into sentences of your own)

50% content (clear/convincing examples, supporting evidence/quotes, thoughtful & deep analysis)