

6

Lesson Six

FOCUS: Symbols

Symbols are persons, places, or things in a narrative that have significance beyond a literal understanding. The craft of storytelling depends on symbols to present ideas and point toward new meanings. Most frequently, a specific object will be used to refer to (or symbolize) a more abstract concept. The repeated appearance of an object suggests a non-literal, or figurative, meaning attached to the object. Symbols are often found in the book's title, at the beginning and end of the story, within a profound action, or in the name or personality of a character. The life of a novel is perpetuated by generations of readers interpreting and reinterpreting the main symbols. By identifying and understanding symbols, readers can reveal new interpretations of the novel.

Atticus is named for a leader from ancient Greece. Independent research on the original Atticus will open doors to a deeper understanding of Lee's Atticus. The very names of Maycomb's residents symbolize something about their nature. Mr. Underwood confines himself to a dark office, and Robert E. Lee Ewell may be the antithesis of his Civil War namesake.



Discussion Activities

The only time Atticus describes “sin” to his children, he advises Scout and Jem to avoid shooting mockingbirds. Why does the mockingbird (p. 90) become a central symbol of the novel? How does this warning relate to the other events of the story? How does exploration of the mockingbird shed light on other elements of the story?

To further explore this topic, have students do extra research on mockingbirds. Do mockingbirds have other natural features that relate to the story?



Writing Exercise

In Chapter 15, the drama mounts as Atticus is surrounded by a group of men. How does Scout defuse the potentially violent confrontation? Would you have expected this? Was it convincing that Scout could defuse such tension? Why or why not?

Choose a character whose name serves a symbolic function. Explain how the name as a symbol relates to the real person. Does the person reflect his or her namesake or contradict his or her namesake? Why has Lee depicted them this way?



Homework

Read Chapters 16–18 (pp. 155–189). Read Handout Three. In the first eighteen chapters, how have Jem, Scout, and Dill changed? Are these changes profound or just a result of growing up?