



 Prestwick House

Free Lesson Plan

INTRODUCING SYMBOLS—THE BEACH



Objectives:

- Introduce students to the concept of symbols
- Teach students to identify differences between the figurative or symbolic meaning and the literal significance of objects and images
- Teach students to identify how symbols are developed through literary works

Time:

60 Minutes or 1 Class Period

Materials:

One copy of the handout per student
Whiteboard or chalkboard

Procedures:

1. Write the word “BEACH” in large letters in the center of the blackboard and ask your students to provide a list of words that they associate with the beach. On the right side of the word, write down concrete terms related to the physical aspects of the beach, and on the left-hand side of the board write down words that are more abstract.

Examples of the types of words you might get are:

Concrete: *Sand, Waves, Ocean, Salt, Boardwalk, Sea*

Abstract: *Summer, Fun, Family, Vacations, Relaxation, Parties*

2. When you’ve gathered a significant number of abstract words, introduce the definition of a symbol and relate the symbol of the beach to the definition.

What is a symbol?

A symbol is a literary device in which an object, place, or person is used to represent an abstract idea—often with multiple levels of meaning.

When someone says the word “beach,” we’re not only thinking about the literal meaning—the sandy border between the ocean and land. We think about the experiences that we’ve had at the beach and the personal meaning that it has for us. If we’ve been to the beach, we think about those times; if we haven’t, we think about the TV shows and movies we’ve watched and the books we’ve read that inform our view of the beach.

This collection of different memories, thoughts, and interactions makes the beach a powerful symbol in many people’s minds—even without an author’s intervention.



3. Have your students read passage 1 from the handout. In this passage, the author has developed many of the traditional, vacation-oriented facets of the beach.

When they've completed reading the passage, ask them to answer the following questions:

What is literally happening in this passage?

The student is sitting in a classroom waiting for his summer vacation to begin.

What does the beach symbolize or mean in this passage:

The beach carries three primary symbols in this passage –

1. *Fun and Vacation*
2. *Family & Shared History*
3. *Summer*

What words or phrases that help you come to this conclusion?

1. *Fun and Vacation:*
"loved to build sand castles"
"the fun that he had last year at the amusement park"
"couldn't wait to challenge his brother to a game of miniature golf"
2. *Family & Shared History*
"Paul's parents would be picking him up at 3pm"
"challenge his brother"
"youngest cousin"
3. *Summer*
"the final bell of the year"
"Summer is only 20 minutes away."

4. Note that symbols often reflect traditional meanings of the words, but the meaning of a symbol is often changed, developed, or altered by an author to suit his or her needs in a work. Have your students read the second passage and answer the same questions.

What is literally happening in this passage?

A man reaching retirement has moved into his beach house and is setting out on a new project—writing a book.

What does the beach symbolize or mean in this passage?

In the second passage, the beach serves as a symbol of very different things.

1. *Achievement*
2. *New Projects*
3. *Relaxation*

What words or phrases that help you come to this conclusion?

1. *Achievement:*

“The day was finally here”

“His children were grown and successful, his retirement was fully funded, and he’d just purchased his dream house”

“he’d been waiting for this day”

“he began to work”

2. *Fresh Starts – the boundary between the past and future*

“sun rose over the water”

“the border between the chaotic ocean and the tranquil beach”

“For 37 years, he’d been waiting for this day”

“youngest cousin”

3. *Relaxation*

“sat on his porch with his morning coffee as the sun rose over the water”

“peacefully to the sound of the waves”

Note that in both cases the beach is an important symbol, but the author has developed the beach in a different way. When you ask what the beach symbolizes, you can’t summarize the symbols in just a few words. By developing symbols the author has worked with the reader to create a stronger meaning than a simple one word answer can define. It’s the interplay between the associations that the reader already has with the symbol—the personal connections, the books he or she has read, the TV shows that he or she has seen—and the picture that the author draws in the work that he or she has created.

5. Ask your students to think of other popular symbols that have meanings. Some examples are:

Spring–Birth

Winter–Death

Night–Evil

Use a symbol dictionary (see references) or the Internet to explore any symbols that students might want to examine in more depth.

6. (Optional) Select a scene from a book you’re reading, or read earlier this year, that has a clear symbol and explore how that symbol is developed by the author. Some examples might be:

The Lord of the Flies–the pig or the conch shell

The Scarlet Letter–the “A” or Pearl

The Great Gatsby–the green light or Gatsby’s white suit

HANDOUT – INTRODUCING SYMBOLS – THE BEACH



Passage 1:

How long can a school day feel? It was only 20 minutes until the final bell of the year, and Paul's parents would be picking him up at 3pm with the car fully loaded for their annual beach trip. His cousins and grandparents would be there already in the house that they rented for the first week of summer every year.

As he counted down the minutes, Paul stared out the window thinking about how his youngest cousin loved to build sand castles and how his aunt and father would wake a dawn to see the sun rise over the ocean. He chuckled to himself as he remembered the fun that he had last year at the amusement park on the boardwalk, and he couldn't wait to challenge his brother to a game of miniature golf.

Summer is only 20 minutes away.

Questions:

What is literally happening in this passage?

What does the beach symbolize or mean in this passage?

Highlight words or phrases that help you come to this conclusion.

Passage 2:

Carl sat on his porch with his morning coffee as the sun rose over the water, looking out over the waves as they crashed ceaselessly against the shore—the border between the chaotic ocean and the tranquil beach.

The day was finally here—after 37 years of waking up each day to go work, he was retiring. His children were grown and successful, his retirement was fully funded, and he'd just purchased his dream house—a small beach house on the shore with a porch overlooking the ocean. For 37 years, he'd been waiting for this day, when he could finally sit down peacefully to the sound of the waves and begin work on his book—the one he's been planning at lunch breaks and during the hour-long commute as he tried to block out the car horns and the sound of the trains.

At long last, he took out his pen, and he began to work on the book he'd been planning for so long.

Questions:

What is literally happening in this passage?

What does the beach symbolize or mean in this passage?

Highlight words or phrases that help you come to this conclusion.



Homework:

Think of a place, object, or person that means something to you and write down everything that that object symbolizes to you; then write a ½ page story that displays what that symbol means to you.

Standards:

Common Core State Standards – Reading: Literature

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.9-10.1

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.9-10.3

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.9-10.4

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.9-10.5

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

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§ 110.51.b

Sources:

Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. New York. Publisher: Harper, 2003.

Chevalier, Jean and Gheerbrant, Alain. *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*. London. Publisher: Penguin Books, 1982.



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