Symbolism Practice: Short Story Edition

Symbols pervade our lives. Individuals, shapes, events, and places become symbolic when they represent a larger idea. This is especially true when the material represents the immaterial. A person can symbolize a principle. A shape can symbolize an emotion.

A symbol in literature is a person, place, object, or event that contains additional layers of meaning. While visual symbols typically represent a single idea, literary symbols tend to be complex. Literary symbols often represent multiple (even contradictory) ideas. For example, a rotten apple in a story might represent a traumatic event, a character, the character’s festering hatred, and even forgiveness.

**Famous symbols from literature:**
- The mockingbird in *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- The whale in *Moby Dick*
- Mama’s plant in *A Raisin in the Sun*
- The “windy hilltops” of *Wuthering Heights*
- The pig’s head in *Lord of the Flies*
- The river in *Heart of Darkness*
- The mockingjay in *The Hunger Games*

**Literary symbols in pop culture:**
- The bat in *Batman Begins* is more than a visual of a swift, creepy critter that hunts at night. It also represents trauma. It is the fear Wayne must face, master, and instill in others.
- The Scarlet Carson rose in *V for Vendetta* represents the protagonist’s slowly cultivated revenge, his memories of beauty, and even his mercy.
- The rose in *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast* is literally a magical flower, but it possesses complex meanings surrounding appearances, regret, love, and mortality.

**Identify literary symbols:**
Your literary symbol can be from any medium (film, novel, poem, song, comic, series, etc.).

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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Symbol and meaning</th>
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Title:_________________________________________ by _______________________

**Protagonist (main character):** The person at the center of the action. Think about character traits and motivation.

[Blank space for character description]

**Point of View:** Who is telling the story? Is the narrator involved (first-person point of view)? Is the narrator omniscient (all-knowing)? What tone (attitude) does narrator take?

[Blank space for point of view]

**Conflict:** The struggle between opposing forces. (It may be internal.) How is it resolved?

[Blank space for conflict details]

**Theme:** What is the main message about life or humanity?

[Blank space for theme]

**Symbol:** Which details (people, places, objects, or events) may have layers of meaning?

What is the main symbol of the story? __________________________________________

Key quote in developing the symbol:

[Blank space for key quote]

What does this symbol represent? (Remember, it may represent several things.)

[Blank space for symbol representation]