Symbolism/Motifs/Colors in Literature

In literature, themes, motifs, and symbols serve a number of purposes. Some convey meanings other than those explicitly in the text. Others help the reader understand motivations of a character or an author’s intended message. Sometimes themes, symbols, or motifs simply paint a picture in the reader’s mind through repetition of imagery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>The theme is the subject of a talk, a piece of writing, a person's thoughts, or an exhibition; a topic or take-away message.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOTIF</td>
<td>A motif is a distinctive feature or repeating idea in an artistic or literary composition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SYMBOL</td>
<td>A symbol is an object representing, or used for, something else; frequently an emblem, token, or sign, which represents something deeper and more important. It might be a material object representing something immaterial.</td>
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**Motifs**

So, how does motif fit in? Here’s where students (and adults) become confused. A motif is a meaningful pattern of symbols, character types, actions, or events that reinforce the theme. A motif is not the theme, but it paints a picture of the theme for the reader to discover. A symbol by itself is not a motif—however, if the symbol repeats throughout the work, it may be a motif.

**Color**

If audiences see a new character wearing black clothes, enter the scene from the shadows, or travel under the cover of night, chances are there’s trouble brewing. Color is one of the strongest motifs in literature, and colors often represent the same emotions or themes across genres. Even the youngest audiences recognize that white represents purity or goodness, black is evil or deceit, red is passion or anger, and so forth. Although there are certainly exceptions, color remains a consistent motif.

**Weather**

In literature, nothing good ever happens on a “dark and stormy night.” Weather is a strong motif in literature in part because it has real-world applications; rather than people assigning an abstract meaning to natural events, we can observe the real changes weather creates and we connect these changes to corresponding events in literature. For example, in Shakespeare’s Macbeth, thunder and lightning accompany the witches, rain and storms serve as the backdrop for murders, and fog rolls over Scotland as Macbeth begins his quest for the throne. In The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gatsby and Daisy have an uncomfortable, gloomy reunion in the pouring rain, Gatsby and Tom have an angry confrontation on the hottest day of the year.

**Keys**

What’s behind that locked door or gate—a secret garden, an insane wife, a three-headed dog? Keys as motif pop up in many well-known works of literature. They can represent protection, secrets, or growth, but what other else can a key do

**Quest**

A quest is more than a bit of travel; it’s a journey to find or save something, filled with difficult and dangerous adventures along the way. When an author frequently mentions the many challenges the protagonist must overcome, the reader is experiencing a lesson on personal growth, redemption, or other themes the author wishes to explore. Dorothy comes back from
Oz with a greater love for Kansas and understanding of her own capabilities, Bilbo Baggins returns to the Shire a wealthy and wise hobbit, and Jesse learns to overcome tragedy as he travels to and from Terabithia. Travel and journeys almost always point to the growth of a character.

Abandonment
So many heroes and villains alike are deeply influenced by being abandoned at some point in their stories, often as babies or children. Being left alone forces a character to make choices without the encouragement or support of anyone else, and when characters experience abandonment repeatedly in a story, the author may be building a commentary on loyalty, self-worth, or resilience. Recurring abandonment by men in Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*—first by the family patriarch, then by the “gentleman caller” Jim, and finally by the narrator, Tom—causes both women to retreat further from reality. Abandonment is often unpleasant, of course, and curriculum writers should exercise sensitivity, as abandonment could be an issue students are struggling with in their own lives.

**Color Symbolism**

**Red**: Excitement, energy, passion, love, desire, speed, strength, power, heat, aggression, danger, fire, blood, war, violence, all things intense and passionate, sincerity, happiness (Only in Japan)

**Pink** symbolizes love and romance, caring, tenderness, acceptance and calm.

**Beige and ivory** symbolize unification. Ivory symbolizes quiet and pleasantness. Beige symbolizes calm and simplicity.

**Yellow** signifies joy, happiness, betrayal, optimism, idealism, imagination, hope, sunshine, summer, gold, philosophy, dishonesty, cowardice, jealousy, covetousness, deceit, illness, hazard and friendship.

**Dark Blue**: Symbolizes integrity, knowledge, power, and seriousness.

**Blue**: Peace, tranquility, cold, calm, stability, harmony, unity, trust, truth, confidence, conservatism, security, cleanliness, order, loyalty, sky, water, technology, depression, appetite suppressant.

**Turquoise** symbolizes calm. Teal symbolizes sophistication. Aquamarine symbolizes water. Lighter turquoise has a feminine appeal.

**Purple**: Royalty, nobility, spirituality, ceremony, mysterious, transformation, wisdom, enlightenment, cruelty, honor, arrogance, mourning, temperance.

**Lavender** symbolizes femininity, grace and elegance.

**Orange**: Energy, balance, enthusiasm, warmth, vibrant, expansive, flamboyant, demanding of attention.

**Green**: Nature, environment, healthy, good luck, renewal, youth, spring, generosity, fertility, jealousy, service, inexperience, envy, misfortune, vigor.

**Brown**: Earth, stability, hearth, home, outdoors, reliability, comfort, endurance, simplicity, and comfort.

**Gray**: Security, reliability, intelligence, staid, modesty, dignity, maturity, solid, conservative, practical, old age, sadness, boring. Silver symbolizes calm.

**White**: Reverence, purity, birth, simplicity, cleanliness, peace, humility, precision, innocence, youth, winter, snow, good, sterility, marriage (Western cultures), death (Eastern cultures), cold, clinical.

**Black**: Power, sexuality, sophistication, formality, elegance, wealth, mystery, fear, evil, unhappiness, depth, style, sadness, remorse, anger, anonymity, underground, good technical color, mourning, death (Western cultures), austerity, detachment.

**Amber**: sun, light, divine glory

**Gold**: exaltation, the best
Western world:

Traffic lights: Red means stop, yellow means caution, and green means go. Yellow signs also warn drivers of upcoming curves, pedestrian crossings, and animal crossings.

Patriotism:
Most, if not all countries have a flag. The colors of each flag are usually seen as patriotic. Red, white, and blue symbolizes patriotism in the U.S.A.

Holidays:
Red and green are favorite Christmas colours. Colors of Autumn such as orange, brown, yellow and red are associated with Thanksgiving with black and orange associated with Halloween. Pastel colors are used for Easter. Because flowers are a common gift for Mother's Day, colors such as yellow, pink, and red are used fre

- See more at:
  http://www.incredibleart.org/lessons/middle/color2.htm#sthash.MHoDCp5d.dpuf

Emotions: Blue is seen as conservative. Red is power and aggression. Brighter colors such as yellow and orange represent warmth not only with emotions but also with temperature. Cool colors are blue, green, black or any color with a dark shade. When someone is feeling down or depressed, it is said they are feeling "blue." When someone is angry they "see red." When someone is seen to be afraid or "chicken" they are called "yellow."

Ecology: Obviously green is the major color symbolizing ecology. The new phrase for people or companies who find ways to cut back on electricity, fuel, or things that damage the environment is "going green."

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Religion: Colours are also used in religious ceremonies or represent aspects of religion. Native Americans include colors in religious ceremonies. The Navajo Nation considers four colors to be important: Turquoise, white, yellow, and black. These colors represent four sacred mountains. The Apache Nation also considers four colors to be important: Green, white, yellow and black. These are sacred colors of the white mountain and are also used in government. The Iowa Nation also considers four colors to be sacred: Black, yellow, red and white. They represent direction, their flag, and what they consider to be four races of man. [1] In Tibetan Buddhism, blue is the color of Vairochana, a celestial Buddha, whose image is the immensity of sky blue. [2] Buddhist monks wear orange (specifically the color saffron) robes primarily due to tradition. That was the least expensive color dye at the time and that is what they continued to wear. The robes themselves symbolize "simplicity and detachment of materialism." [3] Green is the traditional color of Islam. The Islamic flag is green. Green is also mentioned in the Quran as the color of garments, cushions and carpets in paradise. [4] In Hinduism, saffron is their most sacred color. Saffron represents fire that burns our impurities. Yellow represents knowledge and learning. The color green of the Maharashtra represents life and happiness. The color blue is like infinity like the vastness of the oceans and sky. [5] In Christianity, the color red symbolizes the blood of Jesus Christ and of sacrifice. White represents the body of Christ. Black represents sin in Catholic liturgy. Gray is the color of ash and this represents repentance in Catholicism. Purple is the liturgical color for the seasons of Advent and Lent. Heaven is described as having a lot of gold in buildings and streets. White and silver are used in liturgy during Christmas and Easter. [6] The Bible says that many in the Middle East and Rome valued colored
gems and jewelry. Red and white coral was used for beads and ornaments. Red rubies and light blue turquoise were given as gifts. (Ezekiel 27:16) Use in Medicine and Therapy: Colors are sometimes used in therapy (Also called Chromotherapy). Colors have a huge effect on people who have brain disorders or who are emotionally troubled. The color blue has a calming effect on many people and lowers respiration and blood pressure. Red has the opposite effect. Some therapists use green to soothe and relax emotionally disturbed people who suffer from anxiety or depression. Some claim that the color violet is good for migraines and in "cases of cellulitis caused by a poor elimination, heaviness or sluggishness after eating, disorders of the spleen, bladder and kidney." [7] Yellow helps energize people and relieves depression. Color in World Culture Color means many different things to different people and cultures. We all have our own favorite colors. People like different colors like they like different foods. Color also represents feelings, people, countries, cultures, and color symbolism. In the western world, the color red is seen frequently of symbolizing anger or aggression. Some car insurance companies charge more for red cars because some of the owners of
red cars are more aggressive or take more risks.