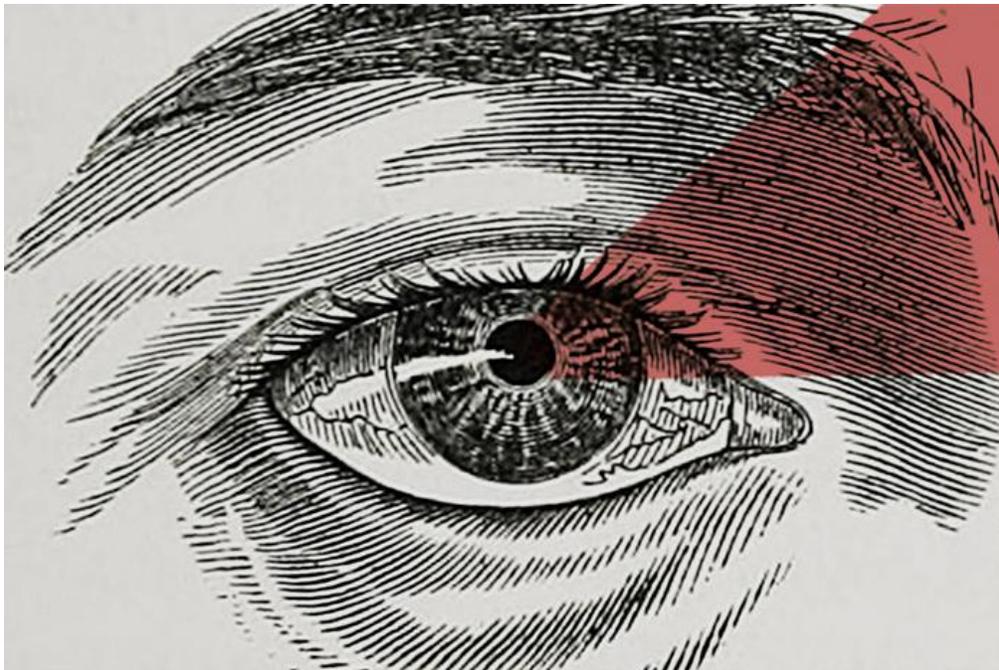


LESSON PLAN:

# What is a symbol? Symbolic Imagery Think-Pair-Share

From [Learning to Look](#)



In her visual literacy column "[Learning to Look](#)," Virginia Seymour takes readers progressively deeper into the skills essential to being a visually literate person. You can follow the "[Learning to Look](#)" column via [RSS Feed](#).

**Time:** 25-30 minutes

**Level:** 6th grade and up

**Preparation:**

Select 2 images from JSTOR. Try browsing or searching within [JSTOR Open Collections](#) for ideas, like these poster collections: [Claremont Colleges' Twentieth Century Posters](#), [Central Washington University's U.S Government Posters](#), or the [Wellcome Collection](#). Based on your class topic, you could focus on political, religious, or cultural symbols.

- *Tip:* Depending on the level of the students, consider selecting images with strong commonalities---either images with similar context but different symbols, different symbols with similar meanings, or same symbols with different context/meanings.

Print these images or display them on an overhead display in Compare mode in JSTOR.

- *Tip:* you can save the images you choose to JSTOR [Workspace](#) for easy access.
- *Instructions for printing:*
  - *Note:* You can print JSTOR images after downloading. Printing is not yet available directly from the image page.
  - View the web-page that has the image you want to print. (For example, use the web-page for the Open Artstor image "[Sci-Art poster](#)" from the [Wellcome Collection](#)).
  - Click the "Download" button that appears to the top right of the page



- Open the file using your machine's file management system. (It will likely appear in your "downloads" folder, or similar, unless your system has been configured differently).
- Print the file directly from your file viewer by clicking Ctrl + P on a PC or Command-P on a Mac.
- *Instructions for Compare mode:* [Using Compare Mode for JSTOR Images](#)

**Materials:** Students should have a writing instrument and should each receive a worksheet, if using option 1 or 2 above. If using option 3, print or digitally share a copy of each image for every group of three students.

- *Tip:* You can [download individual images](#) directly from search results or item pages, or [download groups of images from Workspace](#)

## Directions

Prepare the class with an overview of symbols and symbolism or assign [What is a Symbol?](#) as reading and discuss. Consider addressing: What is the difference between a symbol and an icon? How do symbols gain meaning and change over time? What makes a “good” or effective symbol?

### Activity

1. Count the class off in twos.
2. Either on an overhead display or printed sheets, give “ones” one image and “twos” a different image.
3. **Think:** Instruct students to investigate their image on their own for 3-5 minutes. Provide students with the following prompts: *What colors, shapes, people, or objects do you think are symbols? Can you guess what these symbols are intended to communicate?*
4. **Pair:** In pairs of “ones” and “twos”, have students compare their images and the symbols they noticed for 5-7 minutes. Provide students with the prompts to discuss: *What do these images have in common and what is different? Is the context (place, time, or culture) the same or different? Are there similar symbols that mean different things? Are there different symbols that might mean similar things?*
  - *Tip:* If using printed images, this is a good time to put the images on an overhead display side-by-side in [JSTOR's compare mode](#).
5. Before coming back together as a group, instruct pairs to write down one outstanding question they have about each image.
6. **Share:** As a class, discuss the symbols: *What symbols did students notice? how did students go about identifying potential symbols and guessing their meaning? What outstanding questions do students have about the images?*
  - *Tip:* If the content is important to the class topic, this is a great time to move into the actual symbolism in the works. If not, this can be a good segue into talking about research and the process of investigating symbolic imagery in different contexts and researching symbols' meaning.