

READING FOR MEANING: OBJECTS AS SYMBOLS

Rationale

Whilst teaching the actual mechanics of translating print into words is by no means easy, teaching pupils to read for deeper meaning often presents much more of a challenge. If only pupils could appreciate that some parts of the text have more significance than others, they could perhaps hone in on the meaning with more confidence. And if we can make that an interesting process using tangible objects, then they may just get the point. Children relate well to things they can see and touch, so it seems to make sense to use objects to symbolise significant moments in stories, poems and other sequences of events. Aside from developing reading for meaning and speaking and listening skills, using objects in this way can help pupils consider significance when composing their own writing.

This resource provides step by step guidance on how to introduce and develop the concept of using objects to symbolise key moments from texts. All you need to do is select a text, identify a few key moments and then think about what objects you might need as symbols. Then you can start hunting for the objects. However, if a particular object is not available, a visual image or even a card with the name of the object on would be a good substitute.

WHAT TO DO

Preparation

Select up to 6 key moments in a text and think of an object that could symbolise/represent each moment. Choose a different object for each moment.

Examples:

- The Highwayman by Alfred Noyes A piece of lace could represent when he fell 'like a dog on the highway' with 'a bunch of lace at his throat' and a small toy horse could indicate the role of Tim the ostler in his downfall.

- Red Snow by Lorraine S Harrison A toy cat to represent the wild cat that is central to the story and red and white ribbons to represent the symbolism linked to mental health.
- Pumpkin Soup by Helen Cooper A wooden spoon would draw attention to the plight of the duck and a twig or a leaf would represent the woods where he was feared to have been lost.

Introducing the objects

- Before introducing pupils to the text, put the objects on display in a line. With younger pupils, or lower attainers it may be useful to number the objects and/or arrange them in the order in which they are likely to occur in the text.
- Then ask the pupils to consider the objects as clues, giving information about important things in the forthcoming text. Invite pupils to use the objects to speculate on what sort of text it might be and what important things might happen i.e. what the objects might signify/symbolise.

Development

- Leave the objects on display as you read the text with the class, but before reading the text, explain that you will stop at appropriate points to allow the pupils time to think about and discuss what each object symbolises. This ensures pupils do not interrupt the reading by continually calling out their ideas.

Optional versions for group work

Which is which?

- Collect objects that signify key moments from 2 different texts and place them in a box or bag with copies of the two texts. You can use copies of longer texts/short novels if the pupils have already read them.

- Ask pupils to work in pairs or threes to work out which objects go with which texts and why. The speculations can be recorded in written form, or presented as verbal feedback in a small guided reading group.
- Alternatively, or additionally, you can place a rogue object in with the others, to see if the pupils can identify which object is not intended as a symbol.

Text boxes

- Collect shoe boxes and designate a different text to each box.
- Select 6 small objects to represent key moments for each text and place the objects in the appropriate boxes.
- Give pairs of pupils a box each and ask them to speculate on what moments or features of the text the objects are meant to represent.
- They should record their speculations in writing or present them verbally as part of oral feedback in a supervised group situation.
- Pupils may like to make up their own boxes for homework, using objects from home or make text bags or envelopes using pictures of objects taken from magazines/catalogues. The envelopes can also be decorated with symbolic images if appropriate.

What objects will you choose and why?

- Organise pupils into pairs or threes and give them a short text and some small cards.
- Ask them to think of 2 - 4 objects that will represent key moments or aspects of the text. They can draw a picture or write the name of each object on the small cards (one object per card).
- Pairs can record the reasons for their choices in writing and/or feedback to the group.

Examples of objects/items linked to texts

Key Stage 1: Wish You Were Here by Martina Selway (Red Fox)

- Unwritten postcard – signifying Rosie writing home about her camping holiday.
- Biscuit wrapper – signifying the first moment Rosie feels positive about the holiday when another child offers her a biscuit.
- A plastic spatula (and/or toy frying pan and fried egg) – signifying how Rosie struggles to help make the breakfast but then learns how to do it well.
- A piece of thick rope – signifying Rosie's attempts to cross the river on a swinging rope as a sign of her growing confidence.

Key Stage 2: Goodnight Mr Tom by Michelle Magorian (Puffin)

- A paintbrush or a pencil to symbolise Willie's talent as an artist.
- A pink baby's dummy to symbolise the incident with Willie's baby sister.
- A luggage label to symbolise the evacuees.
- A plastic letter Z or a card with Z written on to represent his relationship with Zach.
- A picture of a bicycle to symbolise the moment Willie came to terms with Zach's death.

Key Stage 2: Red Snow by Lorraine S Harrison (troubador.co.uk)

- A small cat ornament to represent the wild cats.
- A card with the words War Medal written on to represent the item found in the stolen bag in the tower.
- A white ribbon/picture of a snow scene to represent how the truth has been covered up like snow covered the ground.
- A letter starting Dear Irene ... to represent the one sent by Megan to ask for the truth.
- A paintbrush to represent the painting by Megan's mother indicating that her dad was starting to come to terms with his wife's death.