HOW TO TALK ABOUT SYMBOLISM

IN A PAPER

Upon reading many student papers, I have noticed that many people spend their whole time proving that a symbol is, in fact, a symbol. For example, was that the conch represents civilization, or that Piggy’s glasses represents sight, or that Simon is a Christ figure.

However, that is a shallow, surface level interpretation. You need to take it a step further. Try to think of it like a math problem.

IF \_\_\_\_A\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_, THEN\_\_\_ Y \_\_\_\_ must be true about X because of the qualities of A.

Take a look:

If **Simon = Jesus,** then it means that **even Jesus cannot save us,** because Simon is an ineffective character who cannot save the boys.

If **conch = civilization or society’s rules,** then that means that **society’s rules are fragile and easily broken** because the conch is fragile and easily broken.

You can do this with any symbol and whatever you think that symbol represents. In order to do that, you have to examine the symbol in context. Where does it appear? How does it change over the course of the book? How does it relate to the rest of the story and, most importantly, how does it relate to THEME.

Symbol: Conch

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Where does it appear | How is it described and what are its qualities? What happens to it? | How can it connect to the rest of the story?  |
| Beginning |  |  |
| Middle |  |  |
| End |  |  |

Symbol:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Where does it appear | How is it described and what are its qualities? What happens to it? | How can it connect to the rest of the story?  |
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