

METAPHOR AND SYMBOLISM IN ART...

Symbol:

A sign or picture that can communicate a message beyond that of the initial object.

An example of a symbol is the skull and crossbones which can symbolise; poison, pirates and death.



Metaphor:

A figure of speech / writing where a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable, in order to suggest a resemblance.

'Venus, that brilliant diamond in the sky'

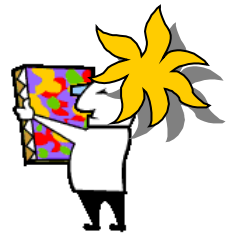
star?  or gemstone?



In artworks symbols are often used as visual metaphors, where an object or form refers to or 'stands' for something more complex or different.

The term 'symbolism' was first coined in 1886 to describe poetry but was soon used to describe visual art where ideas, psychological content and meaning took precedence over the realistic depiction of the natural world.

Interpretation of symbols in artworks depends upon your cultural capital, use of intelligence, imagination and creative thinking.



Visual Symbols...

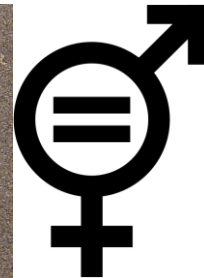
As a class, in groups or individually...

Look at these common symbols (below) ... what do they symbolise to you?

What do the colours red, black, and white commonly signify? Across all cultures?

Do a quick internet search on funeral and wedding colours/dress to see...

With a friend or in teams have a go at creating a symbol for 'school' or 'home'

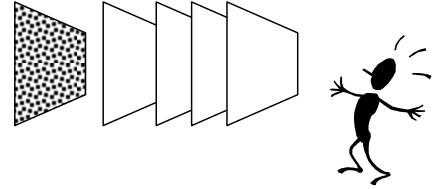


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Visual Metaphors...

Metaphors and symbolism in artworks are subjective, personal and cultural. They do not necessarily symbolise the same things to different people. Some symbols are almost universal while others may be read differently because of cultural meanings or the person's experiences.

Vincent Lanier – a prominent Art theorist believes an Artwork is seen by a viewer through a number of different layers. These include aspects such as: gender, religious beliefs, cultural background, knowledge and life experience.



“Metaphor colours our language and enriches our visual representations...used as a device it can create relationships between things in the world and foster creativity in artmaking.

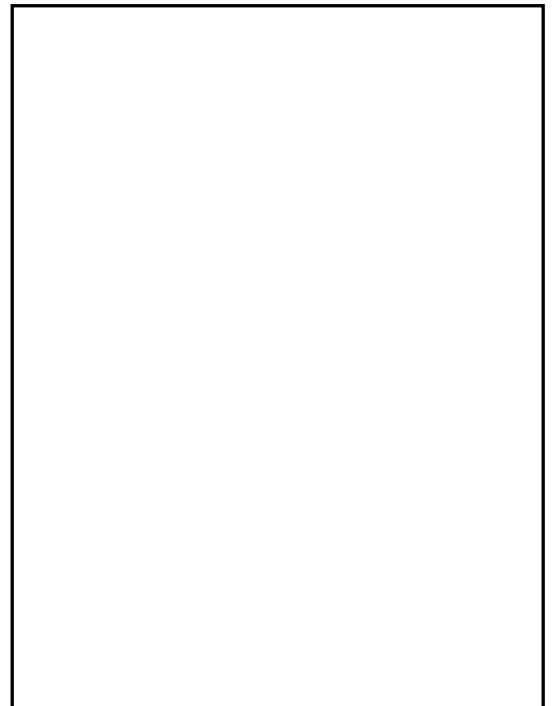
Metaphors help us to ‘capture’ our experiences of the world in a unique way. They give us a way to connect objects, events, actions that appear unrelated but are part of our cultural expression.”

Janet Rentz.

Look at this work by Frida Kahlo

Image removed for copyright but readily available online: ‘Broken Column’ by Frida Kahlo. You could also look at the Two Fridas or any other suitable works)

- ◇ Look carefully at the artwork and list as many signs or symbols in the artwork that you can identify (this may be covered in a class or group discussion).
- ◇ Decide what you think the metaphoric references are for the symbols in her work and write down your ideas.
- ◇ What significance do you think the clothing or lack of clothing has?
- ◇ Read about the life of the artist in the resources provided or online- Does this new knowledge add anything to the meanings that you perceived initially in the work?



NOW: CREATE YOUR OWN SYMBOLIC SELF_PORTRAIT

Using the Photoshop skills you gained recently...

Kahlo created many art works that dealt with the representation of self (self-portraits) and the use of symbolism and metaphor.

Have a look at a few as well as all of the other symbolic self-portrait examples provided and then work towards creating your own to practice your Photoshop skills as you shoot initial imagery for your folio.

Before you start sketching your ideas

- Check out the Scanology power-point as you may want to add in real items
- Have a go at the knockout blending mode tutorial so that you can merge easily with background

Planning...

Writing down your ideas can help you to figure out how to represent them visually. Students in the past have written subjective metaphors about themselves to use as the source for the creation of a self-portrait (see below).

- ◇ Use these metaphors written by other students to brainstorm ideas for images that communicate the metaphor.

I feel tied to my sister	I keep my cards close to my chest*
My brother makes my blood boil	I am torn away from the computer
Teachers get on my nerves	I would be lost without sport
My parents dump on me	I put a wall up around me
I am an over the top person	I wear my heart on my sleeve*

* These two phrases are well-known metaphors.

- ◇ Now for the more challenging part. Brainstorm and then write some metaphors, symbols and ideas about yourself on which to base a self-portrait.
- ◇ Sketch your ideas out in a rough form to discuss with others. Then in class get a classmate to take a photograph of you against a pure white or black background to allow you to create a digital self-portrait. You will also need to create images using a digital camera or scanner of the symbols and objects you wish to include.

Some student examples:

(Images of students on original task sheet removed for privacy conditions)