

To Kill A Mockingbird: Symbolism – Part 1

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD: SEEING THE FILM THROUGH THE LENS OF MEDIA LITERACY

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“When we read with our students, we often point out all of the relevant and important symbols in a story or a novel...We assume that students cannot pick up on a symbol on the first read-through, and that may be true, since for a symbol to be truly a symbol, it must be repeated throughout a work, though students may have difficulty picking out symbols because they do not understand the purpose or the function of symbols...so we need to help students see how artists use various techniques to get the audience to recognize that something is, in fact, a symbol.”¹

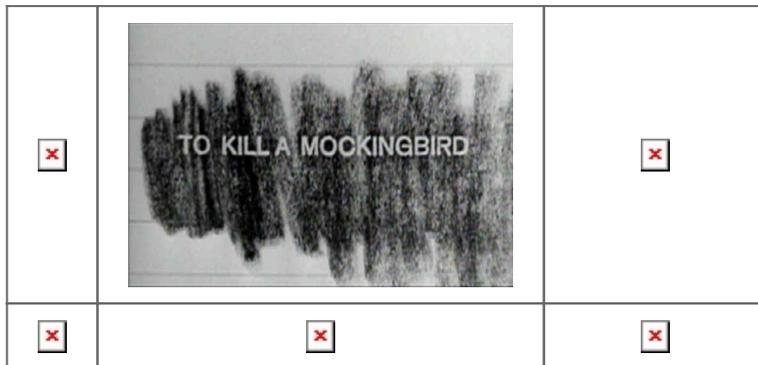
Symbolism/Meaning

“After we have isolated a symbol, we must interpret it, that is, match the symbol with a meaning that has been previously learned. For example, we memorize the definitions of words and the conventions of grammar and expression to be able to read. From our experience listening to radio, we know that certain sounds signal the lead-in to news, certain voices convey humor or seriousness, certain sounds convey danger or silliness. With television or film, we learn the meaning of flashback, an extreme close-up on a character’s face, character stereotypes, and what to expect in the unfolding sequence of a detective show. We have learned to connect certain symbols with certain meanings.”²

Symbolism In The Opening Credits of *To Kill A Mockingbird*

NEW: Watch the [opening credits](#)/ read about them [here](#)

[Listen to Stephen Frankfurt:](#) the man who produced the opening credit sequence



The objects that appear behind the opening credits include a pocket watch, harmonica, pearl necklace, whistle, marbles, and a child's drawing of a bird- items that gain meaning as the story unfolds. The sequence is a good introduction for the story's symbolism and themes. It also shows (to quote Harper Lee again) how a film can have "a life of its own as a work of art."

Notice how the camera moves in, like a child's vision, to close-ups of these valued objects, tracking from left to right along the row of treasures carefully arranged. Notice how the nostalgic music and humming of a child create a mood. And notice what happens to the drawing at the end of the sequence. 3

ACTIVITY

Students should pay careful attention to the opening sequence in the film.

Some of the objects are pictured above. Using the chart (below) students

should complete the form. For each symbol, students should determine:

what is happening in the scene with the object and what it might mean or represent.

Some items seen in opening credits of the film	Describe the scene in which the item is seen/heard	Symbolism meaning or representing
pocket watch		
harmonica		
pearl necklace		
whistle		
marbles		
drawing of a bird		

The man responsible for the look of the [opening credits](#).

Symbolism [continued](#)

See [bibliography](#) for all source material cited here