

**Symbol:** a symbol is an object which represents or ‘stands for’ something else. The symbols, planted in a text, are often a clue to a character’s behaviour, their attitude to life and their hopes and fears.

- a. **Verb:** The “yellow canary birds” *symbolise* Najaf’s dread of detention. (Text 12)
- b. **Noun:** Najaf uses the *symbolism* of the “canary bird in a cage” to highlight his fear of a future without freedom. (*symbolism: the practice of representing things by symbols*)
- c. **Adjective:** The *symbolic* reference to the “bird jumping about in the cage” reveals Najaf’s fear of repressive governments.
- d. **Adverb:** *Symbolically*, the caged birds represent the unnatural qualities of a “caged” life — a life without freedom.
- e. **Adverbial:** *By using the caged canaries as a symbol of imprisonment*, Najaf emphasises the importance of freedom.

**TEXT 34: “The Face in the Mirror” by Blossom Beeby:** *Born in Korea in 1984, Blossom was adopted by white Australian parents. She lives in a white neighbourhood and finds that it is “quite easy to forget I was Asian when everyone around me was white”. However, this is not without consequences.*

*“Parents who acquired ‘Made in Korea’ babies in the 1980s received scant care instructions. Don’t treat delicately. Allow to integrate. Take special care not to acknowledge Asian-ness. My parents heeded the tag, I think. Asian adoptees often talk about their experiences with mirrors. To many of us they have a sad significance. Inside we identified with the Caucasian people who made up our families. If we closed our eyes and imagined ourselves, we would see rosy white kids. When we looked at our faces in the mirror, though, foreigners would appear. I internalised my Asian face, but it didn’t mean that I liked it. I just accepted it (...) For much of my childhood, my Asian-ness was pushed to a crevice in the back of my mind. My friends were white, my family was white, my world was white (...) In both my primary and high schools, I was the only Asian kid in my year.” (324)*

Using the sentence models, analyse the various symbols that reflect Blossom’s identity.

- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....

## The language of symbols

### Using a verb

1. For Mr Neville, items such as handkerchiefs, soap and toilet paper **symbolise** “clean” and “civilised” people. (Text 58)
2. The green light at the end of the dock **symbolises** Jay Gatsby’s capacity for hope.
3. Scout’s breeches **symbolise** her defiance of feminine expectations.
4. Steinbeck **uses** a mouse to **symbolise** Lennie’s childlike simplicity.

### Using a noun

5. The mouse, which is hidden in Lennie’s pocket, is a **symbol** of his child-like craving for affection.
6. The failed brakes become a **symbol** of Toby’s and his mother’s loss of control.
7. In *1984*, Winston’s pen and diary function as **symbols** of his desire to record an alternative personal history.
8. Harper Lee depicts the “small stoves” and the tea set as **symbols** of women’s domesticity.



“I wear the chain I forged in life.”  
(The Ghost in *A Christmas Carol*)

### Using an adjective

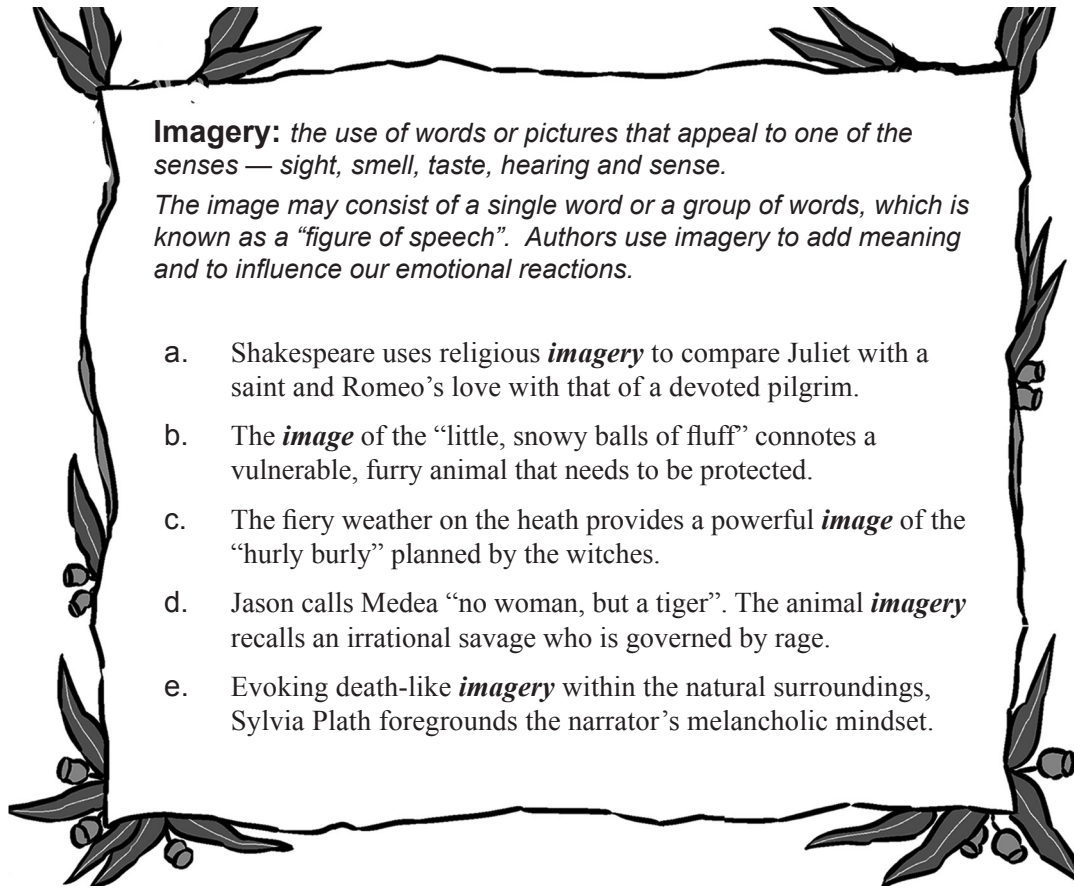
9. The **symbolic** reference to the “animal in the zoo” highlights Simon Tong’s sense of difference within his school community.

### Using an adverb or adverbial

10. Wolff positions Toby and his mother on the “cliff’s edge” to reflect the fact that, **symbolically**, they appear to be courting disaster. (*This Boy’s Life*)
11. **Through the recurring symbolism of the soap, the handkerchiefs and the toilet paper**, Mr Neville draws attention to the need to “civilise” the “natives”. (*No Sugar*)

### Authors often use “darkness” as a symbol of evil or of subconscious impulses.

1. In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding uses the thick jungle undergrowth as a dark and sinister place that functions as a symbol of Jack’s dark and savage impulses. When Jack kills the pig for their feast, he is enveloped in darkness: “He was happy and wore the damp darkness of the forest like his old clothes.” (166). (Notice the simile, the personification and the alliteration.)
2. In *Night*, Elie Wiesel depicts the night as a recurring symbol representing the darkness that descends upon him during Hitler’s reign in Germany. The darkness not only symbolises the loss of hope but also the loss of his spiritual beliefs: “Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed.” (Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Penguin Books: London, 1981. p. 45)



**Imagery:** *the use of words or pictures that appeal to one of the senses — sight, smell, taste, hearing and sense.*

*The image may consist of a single word or a group of words, which is known as a “figure of speech”. Authors use imagery to add meaning and to influence our emotional reactions.*

- a. Shakespeare uses religious **imagery** to compare Juliet with a saint and Romeo’s love with that of a devoted pilgrim.
- b. The **image** of the “little, snowy balls of fluff” connotes a vulnerable, furry animal that needs to be protected.
- c. The fiery weather on the heath provides a powerful **image** of the “hurly burly” planned by the witches.
- d. Jason calls Medea “no woman, but a tiger”. The animal **imagery** recalls an irrational savage who is governed by rage.
- e. Evoking death-like **imagery** within the natural surroundings, Sylvia Plath foregrounds the narrator’s melancholic mindset.

**TEXT 38: *Romeo and Juliet*  
William Shakespeare**

*“I must upfill this osier cage of ours.  
With baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers.  
The earth that’s nature’s mother is her tomb;  
What is her burying grave, that is her womb;  
And from her womb children of divers kind  
We sucking on her natural bosom find:  
Many for many virtues excellent,  
None but for some, and yet all different.  
O mickle is the powerful grace that lies  
In plants, herbs, stones and their true qualities:  
For nought so vile, that on the earth doth live,  
But to the earth some special good doth give;  
Nor ought so good but, strain’d from that fair use,  
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse.  
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,  
And vice sometime by action dignified.  
Within the infant rind of this weak flower  
Poison hath residence, and medicine power:  
For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each  
part (...)”*

*Friar Lawrence, Act 2, Scene 3, (7 - 24)*

In his soliloquy, Friar Lawrence fills his “osier cage” with both “baleful weeds” and “precious-juiced flowers”. (Act 2, Scene 3)

- ◆ Friar Lawrence uses plant **imagery** to reflect upon the complementary nature of the earth’s qualities.
- ◆ The **image** of mother earth as a “womb” and a “tomb” highlights this natural balance, which is reinforced by the use of assonance.
- ◆ The Friar notes that any disruption to the natural order can have harmful consequences. He juxtaposes the virtuous and the vile qualities of the plant. The mickle plant is a “powerful grace” but it is also quite “vile”, particularly if “strained” from its “fair use”.
- ◆ This **image** of “misapplied” virtue is used analogously to the feuding clans (“Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied.”). Shakespeare’s point is that love and peace have been “strained” from “fair use” through intolerance and violence.

**TEXT 50:** In “Perfect Chinese Children”, Vanessa Woods is often singled out as the “human turd” in the playground. She struggles with a lonely sense of difference. She is unhappy. The family is poor; Vanessa’s mother is divorced and her father is unsupportive. Vanessa struggles to fulfil her mother’s expectations.

“It doesn’t bother me that we are poor. I’ve found a way to combat it — I steal from other children. When I get kicked out of class for misbehaving, which is often, I rifle through the school bags of all the other kids and steal their lunch money, as well as anything else I like.

When I finally get caught, I’m terrified Yee Mah will burn off my tongue like she’s always threatening. Instead, my mother sits me down at the dining-room table. She is very quiet. She puts her hand on my hand and says, What do other children have that you don’t? If I were smarter, I would hear her heart breaking.

‘Erasers with Snow White on them,’ I say without hesitating.

‘All right,’ says my mother. ‘Go to your room’. As I leave, I see her bow her head, as if she’s carrying a great burden. It’s shame. And she’s not ashamed of me, she’s ashamed of herself.

For failing to teach me the difference between right and wrong. For failing to make me feel like I am warm and safe and don’t need to steal from other kids to make up for everything I don’t have. The next day, the Snow White erasers are on the dining room table. I don’t even want them.” (109)



**Essay Topic: Having a sense of difference makes it difficult to belong: Vanessa Woods**

1. **Topic Sentence:** Differences in social status as well as family problems may lead to feelings of insecurity and a lack of confidence.
2. **Include examples of Vanessa’s anti-social behaviour; analyse the symbolism of the Snow White erasers. (Use quotes.) How do they reflect the mother’s and daughter’s relationship?**

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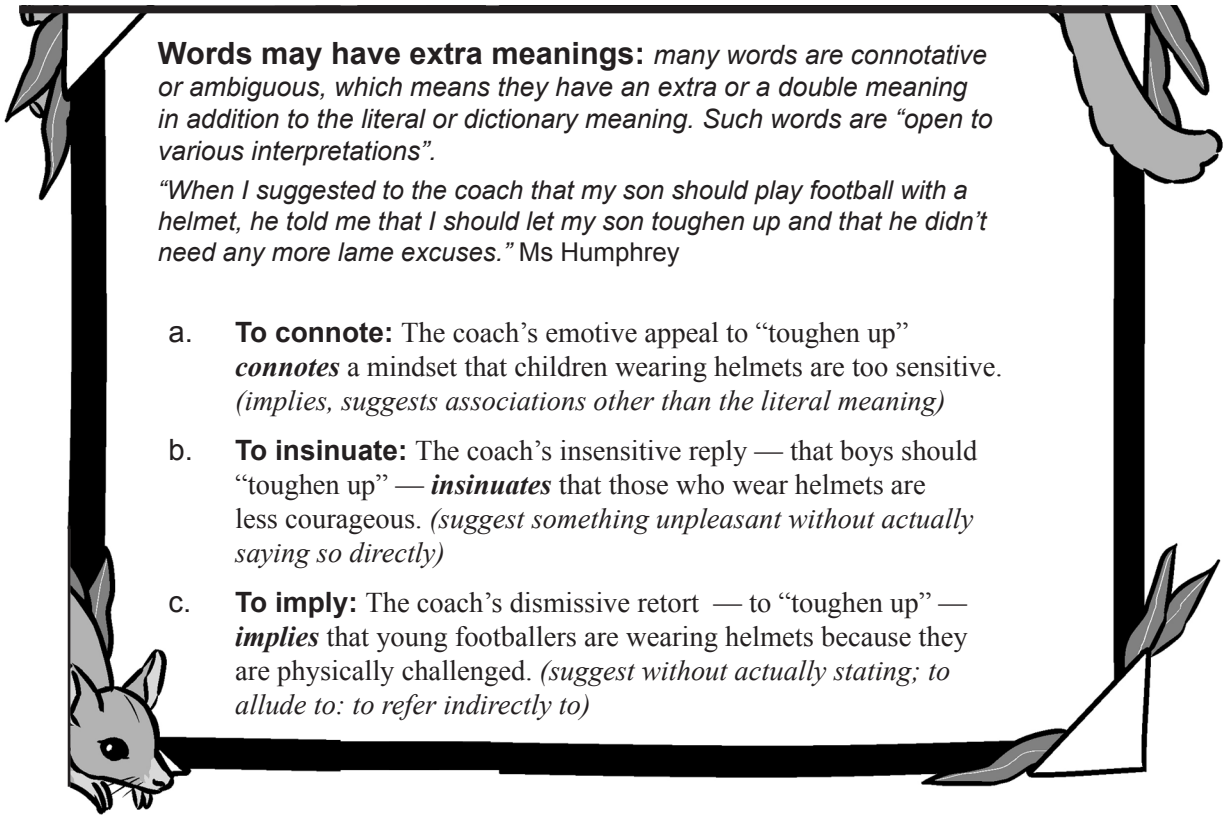
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3. **Link to topic:** .....
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**Words may have extra meanings:** *many words are connotative or ambiguous, which means they have an extra or a double meaning in addition to the literal or dictionary meaning. Such words are “open to various interpretations”.*

*“When I suggested to the coach that my son should play football with a helmet, he told me that I should let my son toughen up and that he didn’t need any more lame excuses.” Ms Humphrey*

- To connote:** The coach’s emotive appeal to “toughen up” *connotes* a mindset that children wearing helmets are too sensitive. *(implies, suggests associations other than the literal meaning)*
- To insinuate:** The coach’s insensitive reply — that boys should “toughen up” — *insinuates* that those who wear helmets are less courageous. *(suggest something unpleasant without actually saying so directly)*
- To imply:** The coach’s dismissive retort — to “toughen up” — *implies* that young footballers are wearing helmets because they are physically challenged. *(suggest without actually stating; to allude to: to refer indirectly to)*

**TEXT 47: “Baked Beans and Burnt Toast” by Jacqui Larkin: Reflecting upon her experiences in her first year at school, Jacqui recalls the boy in the playground who liked to “stare”.**

*“Jo-Ann and I are playing chasings with some other girls from class when I notice a boy approaching us. He’s much older than us, probably even in second grade, and for a while he just stands there staring at me.*

*‘Ching-chong, ching-chong sitting in a tree. **Eating chop suey with a flea.**’*

*From that day on I have that stupid taunt stuck in my head (...)*

*My teaser’s name is Peter Nugent, I learn after he has been dragged off to the administration block and issued with **six of the best**, and he is **a child psychologist’s dream**. Nowadays he would be diagnosed with ADHD and dosed up to the gills on Ritalin; but back in the early seventies **his type were allowed to roam free**. They would tear around the playground **like the Tasmanian devil in those old cartoons**, beating other boys at random, setting fire to girls’ skipping ropes while they were mid-skip and taunting anyone who showed up on their radar.” (333)*

**Using the sentence models, analyse the double meanings of the bolded text.**

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**Words with extra meanings:** *an author’s descriptions or use of figurative language hint at, or imply, extra meanings. Readers use inference to interpret and evaluate an author’s intentions. (See p. 58.)*

- Verb (to imply):** The coach’s reference to the young footballer’s “lame excuses” **implies** that the footballer is not committed to the game. (*to imply: to suggest without actually stating; reference to associations other than the literal meaning*)
- Noun:** The **implication** of the coach’s statement — “he didn’t need any more lame excuses” — is that the young player is trying to avoid physical contact.
- Verb (to infer):** Ms Humphrey **infers** from the coach’s reply that he is indifferent to her son’s wellbeing. (*to infer: reach from facts, reasoning and the context*)
- Noun:** According to Ms Humphrey, the **inference** of the coach’s comment is that her son is trying to avoid physical contact.

**TEXT 48:** *In A Christmas Carol, the citizens, the dogs and “human sympathy” keep their distance from Scrooge. “Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, “My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?” (...) No children asked him what it was o’clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blindmen’s dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, ‘no eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!’”.*

*But what did Scrooge care? It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance.” (34-35)*

Using the sentence models analyse the implications of the bolded words. What do readers infer?

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**Expression:**

**Scott writes:** *The reference to Scrooge warning ‘human sympathy to keep its distance’ **infers** that he avoids emotional engagement with people.*

**Grammar tip:** *Scott should use “**implies**” rather than “**infers**”.*