

## Symbol and Irony and the Short Story

**Symbol and irony** are both forms of powerful *literary compression*, meaning that they enable the writer to *say a great deal as briefly as possible*.

A **symbol means more than it is**. It is something that enhances a story's meaning and theme by representing something else, especially a material object that represents something abstract. For example, a wedding ring symbolizes unity or marriage, a dove symbolizes peace, and the colour purple is a symbol of royalty. Often a symbol in a story is an object that represents its owner's character, situation or both (eg. the landscape in "Hills Like White Elephants"). Characters, actions, setting, colours, names, times of year, and objects can all be used as symbols that add meaning to a story.

A symbol is usually recognized by **emphasis, repetition and position**. Objects that are intended to be viewed symbolically are frequently described in detail, may be included in the title of the story, and are typically emphasized at the beginning or ending of a story.

A **literary symbol** is usually specific to a particular work of fiction and depends upon the context of the story to give it meaning (The white hills have meaning in that short story, but another group of hills may not have the same or any meaning in another work of fiction).

A symbol may have more than one meaning in a story, but these different meanings must not contradict each other (For example, in "One Magical Bloom" the clematis represented the author's connection to her grandfather and her own new-found ability to nurture life).

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**Irony** is a contrast between what appears to be true and what is really true. An ironic ending occurs when the story turns out to be the opposite of what a character in the story or the reader expects, and yet it is still logical. Irony can be comical and make us laugh or bitter and tragic, making us cringe or feel sad.

- **verbal irony** - a contrast between what is said and what is meant. Usually the speaker intends the opposite of what is actually spoken; sarcasm is one form of verbal irony and is used to insult.  
Eg. If it is raining and someone says, "What a lovely day!"  
Eg. If someone hurts you and you say, "What would I do without a friend like you?"
- **dramatic irony** - a contrast between what a character thinks or says and what the audience knows to be true. It is commonly used in plays and television sitcoms.  
Eg. The conclusion of Romeo and Juliet when Romeo, mistakenly thinking that Juliet is dead, stabs himself in order to join her in heaven.
- **situational irony** - a contrast between appearance and reality or between expectation and fulfillment, or between what is happening and what would seem appropriate. This is the most subtle kind of irony; it is also usually the most important kind of irony.  
Eg. A villain plans to murder someone; and when the moment arrives, instead of shooting his intended victim, he accidentally shoots himself.
- **satire** - the use of any of the above forms of irony to ridicule an idea, a person, or a thing, usually with the purpose of provoking change. Satire is usually a term applied to an entire work.

Eg. "A Modest Proposal" by Jonathan Swift