



**FOCUS:** Completing charts ("schematic tables") about passages.

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**DIRECTIONS:** Read the passage. Match the answer choices on the right side of the screen to the correct category on the left side of the screen by dragging the choices to the blanks next to the bullet points. For charts with seven choices, two will not be used. For the chart with ten choices, three will not be used.





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### Symbol, Allegory, and Myth





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Authors use a number of means to communicate an idea without explicitly stating it. **Figurative language** is at the core of literary works which may keep the audience's attention with an engaging story but also include deeper layers of psychological, emotional, or cultural meaning. Symbol, allegory, and myth are three means authors use to accomplish such a goal.

Symbolic language is figurative language. In literary works, *symbols* may be characters, objects, places, events, or even situations or circumstances when they carry a meaning that is more than **literal**. For example, a desert as a symbol may be a barren geographical space but may also represent wasted time, failure, or lack of opportunity. Provided the author and the audience share the same cultural foundation, some symbols can carry universal meaning. In most Western cultures, for instance, the fall season represents a period of aging or lessening of energy and vitality, whereas spring represents new life or hope.

*Allegories* are narratives that are used to communicate a message by employing two levels of meaning, the literal and the figurative, in a one-to-one correspondence. This is to say that a person, place, or thing will be itself but will also represent a single idea or a single quality such as strength or goodness. A famous allegorist in American literature is Nathaniel Hawthorne whose short story "Young Goodman Brown" allegorized a young man's struggle with his faith in humanity. Here, even the names of the characters signify abstract qualities; for example, the young man's wife, Faith, represents the quality of new or untried faith. Another famous allegorist is the British court poet Edmund Spenser, a contemporary of Shakespeare, whose huge six-book poem, *The Faerie Queene*, allegorized many of the national exploits of Queen Elizabeth I.

Finally, *myths* are stories that may express the codes of a people or the very deep aspects of existence. Mythic language is symbolic. Generally, myths are meaningful to an entire people, culture, or civilization and traditionally have been handed down orally or in written form. One type of myth will typically **embody** values that are believed to be central to a culture, and some of these may originate in legend and folktales. For instance, a tale-become-myth told in the United States concerns George Washington, the first president of the country. According to the myth, the young George gets a new hatchet and chops down one of his father's cherry trees. When asked by his father how the tree fell, the boy proclaims, "I cannot tell a lie. I did cut it with my hatchet." This type of myth serves the several purposes of showing the honesty of a founding father and of passing on key values of a culture. Another type of myth, however, originates in a simple human desire or need to explain objects or facts of nature such as the appearance of the sun and moon, the growing of crops, or the origins of people, places, or things. Creation myths that tell the story of the birth of the world are one example. Another is a myth that explains attraction and love, such as that of the maiden Psyche and Cupid, the Greek god of love and son of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty.

Symbol, allegory, and myth are used to convey a deeper message to their audience. While all three forms have roots in ancient history, they continue to be employed today. Indeed, they are so essential to literary tradition that they will most likely continue to be used as long as stories are told.



[View Text](#)[Review](#)[Continue](#)**1** Symbol, Allegory, and Myth**Symbol****Allegory****Myth**

Entertains audience while communicating meaning that is mostly literal

Uses an object, place, idea, or event to refer to something deeper

Employs a plot to expose the audience to cultural references

Transmits cultural attitudes and widely-held beliefs of a people

Relies upon a shared cultural foundation to communicate meaning

Explains how places and things came into being

Tells a story in which characters represent moral qualities

