



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2009 Volume II: The Modern World in Literature and the Arts

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## What Lies Beneath: A Strategy for Introducing Literary Symbolism

Guide for Curriculum Unit 09.02.10  
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When my college prep. sophomores discuss a story we have read and *what it means*, including the literary symbols, I have noticed that often they are not discussing the same story. They are not clear on the sequence of events or what causes what. They do not have a solid understanding of the agents (characters), and their actions, and how these actions affect others, of significant objects in the story, or the prominence of the setting. Since literary symbolism can be fairly sophisticated, it seemed to me that a strategy, or strategies, for introducing it would be an appropriate unit topic.

Beginning with fables, parables, and Dr. Seuss's allegories, the students will complete graphic organizers and storyboards to gain clarity about the sequence of events, and what causes what among the characters, their actions, significant objects, such as the green stars on the bellies of Sneetches, and the setting. Once they have an understanding of the stories with the help of these organizers, followed by class discussions, they will take it to the next level, and again with the use of graphic organizers, they will brainstorm scenarios that are *represented* by the literary symbols in the stories. Progressing from the fable *The Moth and the Star* by James Thurber to *The Bear* by William Faulkner, not only will students learn to identify and interpret literary symbols, they will have the opportunity to write and share their own fables, parables, and allegories.

(Recommended for English, grade 10)

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