



# Seeing Through the Shadows

## Illuminating Allegory and Symbolism



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<b>Grade Level</b>	9th – 10th Grade	<b>Time Frame</b>	90 minutes
<b>Subject</b>	English/Language Arts	<b>Duration</b>	2 class periods

### Essential Question

How can a fictional story tell a deeper truth about the real world?

### Summary

In this lesson, students will explore and identify symbolism in “Plato’s Allegory of the Cave.” They will then create a storyboard to tell their own allegory with symbols that convey a deeper meaning. This lesson can be taught on its own or serve as a pre-reading activity to prepare students for reading texts with meaningful symbolism, such as “Lord of the Flies” or “Animal Farm.”

### Snapshot

#### Engage

Partners use the Silent Discussion strategy to interpret a painting together.

#### Explore

Students investigate the idea of stories having deeper meaning by watching a video about *Plato’s Allegory of the Cave*.

#### Explain

Students formalize their understanding of symbolism and allegories, then identify symbolism used in *Plato’s Allegory of the Cave*.

#### Extend

Students create their own allegory that is told through a storyboard.

#### Evaluate

Students identify the components of their allegory and justify how these components combine to create the theme.

## Standards

*ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Reading (6-12)*

**PPV501:** Infer a purpose in somewhat challenging passages and how that purpose shapes content and style

*Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 9)*

**9.3.R.4:** Evaluate how literary devices impact theme, mood, and/or tone, using textual evidence:

- figurative language (i.e., simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, imagery, symbolism)
- sound devices (i.e., onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance)
- irony (i.e., verbal, situational, dramatic)

**9.7.W:** Create engaging multimodal content that intentionally addresses an audience and accomplishes a purpose.

## Attachments

- [Allegorical Storyboard Preparation—Seeing Through the Shadows.docx](#)
- [Allegorical Storyboard Preparation—Seeing Through the Shadows.pdf](#)
- [Allegory Tracker—Seeing Through the Shadows.docx](#)
- [Allegory Tracker—Seeing Through the Shadows.pdf](#)
- [Lesson Slides—Seeing Through the Shadows.pptx](#)
- [Shared Graphic Organizer—Seeing Through the Shadows.docx](#)
- [Shared Graphic Organizer—Seeing Through the Shadows.pdf](#)
- [Storyboard—Seeing Through the Shadows.docx](#)
- [Storyboard—Seeing Through the Shadows.pdf](#)

## Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- CommonLit account (for teacher use)
- Shared Graphic Organizer handout (attached; one per pair; print one-sided)
- “The Blinding Sun: An Introduction to Allegory” short story ([linked](#); one per student; print two-sided)
- Allegory Tracker handout (attached; one per student; print one-sided)
- Allegorical Storyboard Preparation handout (attached; one per student; print two-sided)
- Storyboard handout (attached; one per student; print one-sided)
- Highlighters (one per student)
- Coloring utensils (optional)

15 minutes

## Engage

To begin, use **slide 3** of the attached **Lesson Slides** to introduce the essential question. Then move to **slide 4** to introduce the learning objectives.

Display **slide 5** and introduce the [Silent Discussion](#) strategy. Arrange students into pairs and give each pair a copy of the attached **Shared Graphic Organizer** handout. All groups should be able to see the presentation clearly, and each pair just needs one writing utensil to share. Explain to students that for the Silent Discussion nobody speaks; instead, they are to communicate using words or sketches on their handout. Students should take turns using the writing utensil to add to the handout to create a back and forth of ideas like a normal conversation.

Show **slide 6** and direct students' attention to the first column of their handout: "Step 1." Have students label this column "See?" as shown on the slide. Explain to pairs that on the next slide they will see a painting and that in this column they are to record all of the details they notice in the painting. Once groups are ready, move to **slide 7** and start the [2-minute timer](#).

Once the timer expires, move to **slide 8** and direct students' attention to the second column of their handout: "Step 2." Have students label this column "Meaning?" as shown on the slide. Explain to pairs that they are to silently work together to answer the question, "What is the meaning behind this painting?" Explain that there is no one correct answer, but groups should come up with ideas based on what they observed. Move to **slide 9**, which shows *The Persistence of Memory* painting by Salvador Dalí. Use this slide to give examples of what student responses for "meaning" could look like. Emphasize to students that simple responses, like the last bullet point on the slide, are okay.

Again, pairs are to collaborate silently using their Shared Graphic Organizer and writing utensil. Once groups understand, move to **slide 10** and start the [2-minute timer](#).

Once the timer expires, show **slide 11** and direct students' attention to the bottom of their handout: "Step 3." Direct pairs to come up with a single response for the meaning behind the painting and be able to support it with details. Again, pairs will collaborate silently using their shared organizer and writing utensil. Then begin the [1-minute timer](#).

When the timer expires, show **slide 12** and ask each pair to pick a spokesperson to share what they came up with and why. Have pairs take turns.

### Sample Student Responses

- **Step 1:** Skeletons, flowers, road, darkness, towel on a hook, garden
- **Step 2:** There is beauty to be found in death. There can be joy in both life and death. Death feeding life.
- **Step 3:** Life and death impact each other. You can nurture life even when you feel bad (dead inside).

Display **slide 13** and share with students the context of this painting from the slide. It is *The Garden of Death* by Hugo Simberg. This painting with the mixture of symbols of life and death—such as smiling skeletons and the flowers they tend—may encourage viewers to think of death as not so scary. Hugo was a Finnish artist who described this piece as "the place where the dead end up before going to Heaven." (Tuschka, 2022)

Before moving on, explain that the point of this activity was to think creatively about meaning and to try to go deeper than what we see on the surface level. Remind students to keep this in mind throughout the lesson.

10 minutes

## Explore

Show **slide 14** and facilitate a brief discussion using the questions on the slide:

- Why are stories important?
- How do people add deeper meaning to stories?

Display **slide 15** and tell students that in the same way artists often convey deeper meaning with their works of art, like in the painting from the previous activity, authors often do the same through stories. Play the [Plato's Allegory of the Cave](#) video on the slide. Stop the video at the 2:58 mark. You can play the entire video if you would like, but the second part gets into more complex philosophical concepts.

### Embedded video

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=1RWOpQXTItA>

Move to **slide 16** and ask students to now think about those same questions again with having now watched the video. Ask for volunteers whose answers have changed to share with the class.

30 minutes

## Explain

Show **slide 17** and give each student a copy of "[The Blinding Sun: An Introduction to Allegory](#)" by Thomas Pool from CommonLit. This reading uses a summary of *Plato's Allegory of the Cave* to explore how stories that seem simple on their surface can be used to convey much deeper meaning. Introduce the [CUS and Discuss](#) strategy and explain to students that while they read, they are to circle the definition of allegory, underline types of allegories, and put a star next to examples of allegories. Also use this slide to remind students of *symbolism*. Have students complete this activity individually (where students read silently), in small groups (where they quietly take turns reading aloud), or as a whole class (where you read the text aloud to the class).

### Teacher's Note: Scaffolding

If students are struggling to find things to circle, underline, or star, here are a few places you can guide them to:

- **Circle the definition of allegory:**
  - Paragraph 2: "An allegory is a story that possesses a hidden meaning which, through interpretation, reveals a broader message."
- **Underline types of allegory:**
  - Paragraph 4: "A fable is an allegory that usually uses animals as characters, in order to impart a moral on the audience."
  - Paragraph 5: "A parable usually seeks to convey a message on morality or spirituality through its story."
- **Star examples of allegory:**
  - Paragraph 4: "*The Tortoise and the Hare*"
  - Paragraph 6: "*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*"
  - Paragraph 11: "*Animal Farm*"

As students complete their reading, give everyone a copy of the attached **Allegory Tracker** handout. Move to **slide 18** and direct students to use what they annotated to try to complete the front side of their handout. Tell students they have 10 minutes to complete this task, then begin the [10-minute timer](#) on the slide.

Once the timer expires, display **slide 19** and ask for volunteers to share how they described the vocabulary: *symbol* and *allegory*. Then transition to **slide 20** to reveal the definitions with examples. Give students time to make corrections and ask questions.

Similarly, show **slide 21** and facilitate a discussion about the listed symbols from the "Allegory of the Cave:" the cave, the shadows, the world outside the cave, and the others in the cave. Then move to **slide 22** to reveal sample responses for those symbols.

Display **slide 23** and direct students' attention to the "Theme" section of their handout. Give students a few minutes to write a theme statement, if they did not have time to do so already, or a few minutes to revise what they had previously written now that they have a better understanding of the vocabulary and what the symbols from the story represent. Remind students that their theme statement should be a complete sentence and universal. As students work, circulate the room and check in with students' progress on their theme statements, giving feedback.

Move to **slide 24** and facilitate a brief discussion using the prompt on the slide:

- What is the relationship between *symbolism* and *allegory*?

Have students keep their Allegory Tracker handout to use as a reference for the rest of the lesson.

30 minutes

## Extend

### Teacher's Note: Purpose

The purpose of the following activity is to have students demonstrate their understanding of symbolism and allegory, not to create a high-quality work of art. Encourage students to be creative and put thought into their stories' drawings, but remind them that this is more of a sketch that should be completed within a brief time period.

Now that students understand how symbolism is used to create an allegory, they are going to create one of their own. You may have students complete this activity individually or in pairs. Show **slide 25** and give each student or pair a copy of the attached **Allegorical Storyboard Preparation** handout. Explain to students that they are going to create their own storyboard that tells a short allegorical story. Describe to students what a storyboard is—how it looks similar to a comic strip—and what your expectations are for the project, especially if you are wanting students to use coloring utensils or not. Remember that the detail of their sketches should not be the focus of the storyboard; consider having students who finish early to add color.

Display **slide 26** as an example and read the guidelines from the handout aloud:

- *Use the boxes of the storyboard to illustrate key scenes and use the lines underneath to summarize what is happening in that part of the story.*
- *Tell a complete story (beginning, middle, and end).*
- *Include 3–5 symbols. Symbols can be characters, objects, actions, or events. Do not reveal what your symbols represent in the storyboard itself.*

Remind students that their allegory should be enjoyable and understandable even if someone does not look for any hidden meaning.

Direct students' attention to the "Potential Themes" section of their handout and let them know that these are some options they could use or they could use their own theme for their allegory.

Show **slide 27** and direct students' attention to the back of their handout: "Storyboard Planning." Review what students should consider before creating their storyboard: audience, purpose, outline of the story and how they plan to illustrate those key scenes, and the symbols they plan to use in their allegory.

Once students understand the expectations of the project, give each student or pair a copy of the attached **Storyboard** handout for them to use to create their own storyboard.

5 minutes

## Evaluate

Once students have completed their storyboards, display **slide 28**. Have students answer the questions on this slide on the back of their Storyboard handout:

- Which symbols did you include, and what does each symbol represent?
- What is the theme of your allegory?
- How do your symbols combine to convey the meaning of your allegory?

## Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). CommonLit. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/2170>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). CUS and discuss. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/162>
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- TED-Ed. (2015, March 17). *Plato's Allegory of the Cave - Alex Gendler* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RWOpQXtItA>
- Tuschka, A. (2022, January 30). *Hugo Simberg - The garden of death*. <https://www.the-artinspector.com/post/hugo-simberg-the-garden-of-death>