

# Symbol

*Help us improve Wikipedia by **supporting it financially**.*

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia  
(Redirected from Symbols)

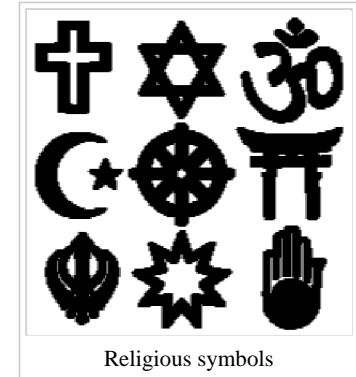
*The musical instrument is spelled cymbal.*

**Symbols** are objects, characters, or other concrete representations of ideas, concepts, or other abstractions. For example, in the United States, Canada and Great Britain, a red octagon is a symbol for the traffic sign meaning "STOP".

Common examples of symbols are the symbols used on maps to denote places of interest, such as crossed sabers to indicate a battlefield, and the numerals used to represent numbers. Common psychological symbols are the use of a gun to represent a penis or a tunnel to represent a vagina.<sup>[1]</sup> See: phallic symbol and yonic symbol.

All language is made up of symbols. The word "cat", whether spoken or written, is not a cat, but is a symbol for a cat.

Contents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 1 Etymology</li> <li>■ 2 The symbolate</li> <li>■ 3 See also</li> <li>■ 4 References <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 4.1 Notes</li> <li>■ 4.2 Other references</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## Etymology

The word "symbol" came to the English language by way of Middle English, from Old French, from Latin, from the Greek σύμβολον (*sýmbolon*) from the root words συν- (*syn-*) meaning "together" and βολή (*bolē*) "a throw", having the approximate meaning of "to throw together", literally a "co-incidence" (*zu-fall*), also "sign, ticket, or contract". The earliest attestation of the term is in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes where Hermes on seeing the tortoise exclaims *συμβολον ηδη μοι* "*sýmbolon* [symbol/sign/portent/encounter/chance find?] of joy to me!" before turning it into a lyre.

## The symbolate

A technical term for an object that serves as a symbol is a symbolate. For example, a scepter[1] is a symbol of royal power. In addition to being a symbol, a scepter is also an object which can be picked up and wielded, and which only fulfills its symbolic purpose when it is wielded by a monarch.

Objects have physical properties; a scepter is essentially a rod with ornamentation. A rod only becomes a scepter when the people viewing the rod accept it as a scepter.

An alien from outer space might describe a royal audience as follows: A human *homo sapiens* wrapped in fibers reflecting light at the high end of the visible frequency range moved an ornamented rod against gravity, at which time other individuals ceased emitting complex sound waves. A human would say that the monarch dressed in a purple robe waved the scepter to silence the crowd.

What is the difference between these two meanings? Leslie White approached the question in an effort to define cultural objects, such as a law, a constitution, a marriage ceremony. All the nouns in the paragraph above are cultural objects: the monarch, the robe, the scepter, the language, and the subjects.

The essence of a cultural object is that it is a token in the process of symbolization. White defined the symbolate as the object created by the act of symbolization, just as an isolate is created by the act of isolation. The scepter stands for royal power, but before this act of symbolization it did not exist as a symbolate, but only as a rod. The scepter was created by its use as a symbol. We are conscious of the symbol, but not of the symbolate.

Symbolates are real objects. The act of symbolization endows the rod with a power it did not possess previously. Ordinary rods have no effect on audiences, but scepters do. However, the power does not reside only in the scepter. Its location is diffuse, some in the people, some in the king, some in the audience. Humanity lives in a world of diffuse powers and possibilities and creates symbolates to communicate with or to manipulate other people.

## See also

- Alchemy
- Applied Drama
- Asemic writing
- Check (mark)
- Computer icons
- Dramatic symbol
- Emblem
- Font
- Glyph
- Grapheme
- Icon (religious) and secular icon
- Letter frequencies
- List of common symbols
- List of symbols
- Logo
- Logotype
- Map-territory relation
- National symbol
- Religious symbolism
- Punctuation
- Representation
- Second-order simulacra
- Semiotics
- Sign (linguistics)
- Siglas poveiras
- Symbol rate
- Symbol Grounding Problem
- Table of mathematical symbols
- Typography
- Unicode symbols

## References

### Notes

1. ↑ David G. Myers, *Psychology*, Worth Publishers; 7th edition (June 6, 2004) ISBN 0716752514 ISBN-13 978-0716752516, p. 282

### Other references

- *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, Second Edition, Unabridged*, W.A. Neilson, T.A. Knott, P.W. Carhart (eds.), G. & C. Merriam Company, Springfield, MA, 1950.

Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbol"

Categories: Symbols | Greek loanwords

---

- This page was last modified 01:44, 7 October 2007.
- All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. (See **Copyrights** for details.) Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a U.S. registered 501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit charity.