

Symbols:

What is a burning bush doing in the story?

Aims

- Students can explain what a symbol is and explore the meanings of a symbol
- Students can explain the significance of the Burning Bush image in the story and in the lives of some Jewish, Christian, and Muslim people.

Objectives

- All students can give an example of an object standing for an idea
- Most students can explain how an object can stand for an idea
- Most students can explain what the Burning Bush symbol may indicate about the view of God in the story and in many Jewish, Christian, and Islamic worldviews.
- Some students will be able to give examples of symbols from other religious writings and suggest meanings.

Key words

Symbol, object, idea

Method

Enquire: What is a symbol?

- Students play 'Bacon and Eggs' game: Ask the students 'Would you rather be...'
 - A feather or a brick?
 - A kitten or a lion?
 - Popcorn or chocolate?
 - A flower or a phone?

Ask the students to say why they have made that choice.

- Have some objects in the room, for example flowers, a lit candle, some water in a bowl, a stone, an egg, a chocolate bar, a brick, a loaf of bread, a superhero figure. Students work in twos or threes. Each group has a set of words on cards: hope, life, temptation, happiness, greed, trust, power, love. Students decide which objects might stand for which idea. They put the word next to the object. Each group explains why they chose that thing for that word.
- Record the students' ideas using the 'triangle' format below. This will then show the key point: that the object has things in common with the idea - what it is like and what it does. An object that helps us understand an idea is called a symbol.



Contextualise: In the story, why is a Burning Bush a symbol of God's presence?

- Students read/listen to the Burning Bush scene. In pairs they come up with any questions or comments they may have about this scene. They share their ideas with another pair, then each group shares an idea with the class.
- Explain that the concept of 'symbol' may help us answer these questions. Explain that in Jewish, Christian and Muslim worldviews, God has no body; you can't see or touch God.

The Burning Bush is a symbol; it stands for God's presence. What does the Burning Bush tell us about Jewish, Muslim, and Christian ideas about God?

- Go outside to some actual trees or have lots of pictures of trees and bring in bark, leaves, twigs and branches. Students could:
 - Do rubbings of the bark and leaves
 - Make colour studies of the bark and leaves
 - Research/discuss what trees do and why they are important
 - Research/discuss what trees can be used for
- The students record their ideas/create their artworks on large paper 'leaves' and stick their 'leaves' on a display-sized tree outline. Examples might include: enable us to breathe, crucial for wildlife, give shade, prevent erosion, provide food, provide fuel, provide shelter, provide materials for making things, keep the soil healthy, etc.
- The students look at pictures of fire in a variety of contexts, both positive and destructive, such as a fire in a fireplace, a barbeque, a cooker, a firework display; and forest fires. Students could:
 - Describe a time they experienced fire (in a good way) – e.g. at a barbeque, or cooking a nice meal, or a bonfire or firework display. Choose words/phrases to describe what they could see/smell/feel and what the fire did.
 - Explore/suggest in what ways a real fire can destroy things; and say how the fire in the story is different.
- The students record their ideas on large paper 'flames' and stick their 'flames on the display-sized tree outline. Examples might include: powerful, keeps us warm, cooks our food, gives us light in the darkness.

Evaluate

- Have a line from one side of the room to the other, with one end 'trees are not important' and the other end 'Trees are very very important'. Students stand somewhere on the line to show what they think. They give an example to back up their opinion.
- Ask the students: if this story is saying that God's presence is like a tree, then in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim worldviews, how important is God's presence?
- Discuss: does this answer all the students' questions about this scene? What about the fire that doesn't destroy the tree? What view of God might this show? Discuss how this might suggest that God's presence is powerful, mysterious / miraculous, and completely good.
- In pairs, students create a caption for the tree display, explaining what the Burning Bush symbol may indicate about the view of God in the story.
 - They could write their own sentence starting 'In the story, God's presence is like a Burning Bush because...'
 - or they could have a 'triangle' diagram as above, with 'Burning Bush' and 'God's presence' and then fill in words that link 'The Burning Bush' with 'God's presence'.
- Extension: Research other symbols of God in Jewish writings, such as the Shepherd (Psalm 23) or the Rock (Psalm 18:2). Explain what each of these symbols may be saying about Jewish views of God.
- If possible, invite two or three people in, from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim worldviews, to talk about when, where, and why they might use this story and what the Burning Bush symbol means for them. The students work in small groups to record what is similar and what is different in their answers.

Communicate and Apply

- Create Quatrain poems, using the objects in the room, or the Burning Bush image, any other thing of their choice:
 - The object
 - Two or three words to describe it
 - Two or three things that it does
 - What idea it could stand for

Here are two examples:

The Burning Bush
Dazzling light, still growing, amazing.
Gives light and warmth. Always living.
Like God's presence.

Stone
Hard and strong
Can't break it. Goes on forever.
Trust.

Resources:

- A collection of evocative objects, such as flowers, a lit candle, some water in a bowl, a stone, an egg, a chocolate bar, a brick, a loaf of bread
- Words on cards: hope, life, temptation, happiness, greed, trust, power, love (see sheet below).
- The story of the Burning Bush
- Bark, leaves, tree pictures
- Pictures of fire in a variety of contexts
- Paper for display work and a large version of the Burning Bush picture

Useful websites for information about the importance of trees:

[Why Do We Need Trees? Benefits to People & Nature - Woodland Trust](#)

[Why Plant Trees | One Tree Planted](#)

[What's so good about trees? | Friends of the Earth](#)

[10 Essential Ways Trees Help Our Planet - Trees for the Future](#)

hope	greed
happiness	life
temptation	trust
power	love