

# 8

## Lesson Eight

### FOCUS: Symbols

#### VOCABULARY WORDS

From “Hurt Hawks”

**Intrepid**, *adj.*

Fearless; courageous; bold

**Intemperate**, *adj.*

Unrestrained; unbridled; severe

**Implacable**, *adj.*

Not to be appeased or pacified;  
unyielding

Fluency with a language involves mastering the literal definitions of words and acquiring a sense of their symbolic associations. Poets are especially adept at this. They use words to convey many meanings at once. *Symbols* are interpretative keys to a text. Poets often use symbols that present ideas and point toward new meanings. Most frequently, a specific object will be used to refer to (or symbolize) a more abstract concept. The repeated appearance of an object suggests a non-literal or figurative meaning attached to the object—above and beyond face value. Symbols are sometimes found right in a poem’s title.

Personal symbolism arises from a poet’s own life; cultural symbolism draws on associations known to a group (which can be as small as a family or as large as a civilization); archetypal symbolism is universal and timeless.

Handout Three in this guide gives an in-depth look at Jeffers’s interest in rocks and hawks, specifically in light of Hawk Tower—a structure he built for his wife, Una. Use this class period to analyze Jeffers’s use of two of his major symbols: stones and hawks.



### Discussion Activities

Divide the class into groups, asking them to share the results of their research on hawk symbolism. What relevance does this have for students’ understanding of “Hurt Hawks” and “Rock and Hawk”? Ask them to connect this with Handout Three, and with other poems they have read by Jeffers such as “Oh Lovely Rock” and “Carmel Point.”



### Writing Exercise

Jeffers once referred to the hawk as his “totem bird” and said that he had an “almost religious feeling” about hawks. What evidence do students see of this in the assigned poems? Explain in a one-page essay, citing specific passages in the text that develop extended meanings through the symbolism of the hawk and/or other symbols.



### Homework

Read “To the House,” “Hooded Night,” and “Shine, Republic.” List the references they contain to religious rituals, historical events, important places, and famous people.