

Symbolism, Imagery, Motifs and Metaphors in I'm Not Scared

Symbol- a thing that represents or stands for something else, esp. a material object representing something abstract.

Symbolism- the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities.

Motif- a distinctive feature or dominant idea in an artistic or literary composition.

Imagery- visually descriptive or figurative language, esp. in a literary work, includes visual symbolism.

Metaphor- a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable or a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, esp. something abstract

Motif

A dominant idea throughout the text is that of heroes. A key motif of Michele is 'Tiger Jack'.

When Michele is running in the night to try to find Filippo, he fights off his fears by asking himself what Tiger Jack, a fictional Navajo hero, would have done: "I must be brave. Tiger Jack. Think of Tiger Jack. The Indian would help me. Before making any move, I must think what the Indian would do in my place. That was the secret" [p. 183].

Q.1 How does Tiger Jack help him?

In the novel's final scene, Michele seems to be lead to the hole where Filippo is hidden by an owl whose nest he has accidentally knocked down. (Owls are often symbols of wisdom)

Q.2 Why has Ammaniti used the owl in this scene?

Imagery- the image of darkness-

I'm Not Scared is preceded by an epigraph by Jack London: "That much he knew. He had fallen into darkness. And at the instant he knew, he ceased to know."

Q.3 Why has Niccolò Ammaniti chosen to begin his novel with this quote?

Q.4 How does it illuminate what happens in the story?

Q.5 What is the literal and symbolic significance, in terms of the novel, of falling into darkness?

Metaphor-

Niccolò Ammaniti uses many metaphors throughout the text. One metaphor that is used is the weather.

The stifling and oppressive heat reflects the mood of the village. There is an uncomfortable feeling in Acqua Traversa. As the text reaches its climax, the weather breaks into a storm. This is an ominous warning of what is to come.

Q.6 What impact did the heat of summer have on the villagers?

Symbolism-

Examples in the text of symbolism include-

The table soccer game-

It symbolises the wealth, or rather, the divide between those who have and those who don't. Salvatore, whose father is a successful lawyer, and the local landowner, can afford to have all of the teams, whereas Pino and Teresa cannot afford to buy Michele one.

Wasps-

The wasps rebuild their nest even after Remo keeps destroying it. (175) This is a symbol of the resilience of family bonds.

The bicycles-

Michele's 'croc' previously belonged to Pino. Michele is proud to ride it. It symbolises the bond with his father. Whereas the new 'red dragon' symbolises something different.

Q.7 What does the 'red dragon' symbolise?

Monsters-

Monsters, bogeyman and all of Michele's irrational child fears symbolise evil to children.

Q.8 How does Ammaniti use the monsters throughout the text?

Vipers-

Vipers and snakes are often used as symbols of evil, a threat to paradise (a religious allusion)

Q.9 Locate where in the text Ammaniti writes about vipers and explain how he uses them as a symbol.

Q.10 Can you identify any other metaphors, symbols or motifs throughout the text? Locate more examples and explain how Ammaniti has used them in the text.

The Setting

The various settings of the novel are important to understanding the novel and adding further complexity to the novel. The various settings include-

- The surrounding wheat fields
- The town of Acqua Traversa
- The hole and abandoned house
- Melichetti's gravina
- The Amitrano house

Task-

For each of the given settings above, locate references to them in the text, and then describe them in your own words. How do they add to the themes or ideas in the text?

e.g.

The Gravina- “gravinas are small canyons, long crevasses dug by the water in the rock....inside there are caves where the shepherds put their sheep” (9)

This setting heightens the excitement of the final scenes. In the pitch dark, it is a scary place to be for a nine-year-old boy, especially when the threats of the kidnappers and Melichetti’s pigs and dogs are added.