Finding symbolism in *The Catcher in the Rye*

A literary symbol is something that means more than what it is: an object, person, situation, or action that in addition to its literal (denotative) meaning suggests other meanings (connotative) as well. *The Catcher in the Rye* is loaded with symbols. We as readers see things like a red hunting hat – usually worn backward – and notice its recurrence but don’t always stop to think why the author included it. After all, if it wasn’t necessary, the author could just as easily have not included it in the novel. But it is there, and it is important to ask *why*, and to try to come to an understanding of its importance. Bear in mind, though, that the story itself should furnish a clue—via repetition, emphasis, or position—that a detail is to be taken symbolically.

Choose something in The Catcher in the Rye that you feel has symbolic value. For some suggestions from your period, see lists below. Then, list what information the book itself (or outside inquiry) might provide you about that item beyond merely the item itself.

Example: if we look for symbolism in Holden's red hunting hat, we might look to the book for the following information:

HAT:

* + Why he wears it
  + When he wears it
  + Whom is Holden with when he wears it
  + Whom does he give it to
  + How he wears it
  + Actions/emotions while wearing it
  + When/where he got it
  + Who asks about it
  + Reactions of others who see him in it
  + How Holden refers to it
  + Others

We might also want to look beyond the book for the following information:

* + What color is it (symbolic value of the color red)
  + What style hat is it (who might buy such a thing, and for what purpose)
  + Was it a popular style of hat at the time
  + Others

Notice that all of these questions have answers that are in the book, or require a little outside research, but will have ***factual answers***. The answers we are looking for here are not speculation -- at least not yet. We want to develop a clear, full, and detailed picture of that hat (for example) ***before***we start assessing its symbolic value. Once we have thoroughly established exactly how the item is used/referenced in the novel, we are finally ready to do our speculating. But now our speculating can be far more informed and well-reasoned, since we no longer are looking "just at a hat."

So, again...

**Choose something in The Catcher in the Rye that you feel has symbolic value. For some suggestions from your period, see lists below. Then, list what information the book itself (or outside inquiry) might provide you about that item beyond merely the item itself.**The purpose here is to move you away from thinking everything has a short, 2- to 3-sentence answer to it; often, what you need to produce will require much more depth than that. Assume for the purposes of this assignment that you will have to produce a 5-page paper on ONE of these symbols.

Develop an outline (see example below) to turn in tomorrow.