

## INNOVATIVE DIGITAL METHODS FOR TEACHING SYMBOLISM IN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE: A CASE STUDY OF “THE BUTTERFLY LION”

*Yuldasheva Zulfizar Sobir kizi*  
EFL teacher, Uzbekistan State World Languages University  
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

**Annotation.** *This article analyzes innovative digital methods for teaching symbolism in children's literature using the example of "The Butterfly Lion." The effectiveness of using interactive applications, digital storytelling, and artificial intelligence tools to reveal the symbols of the butterfly (changeability) and the lion (loyalty) is highlighted. Digital methods develop students' abstract thinking and contribute to a deep understanding of the text. In conclusion, it is emphasized that this approach increases children's motivation and analytical skills.*

**Keywords:** *symbolism, digital methods, children's literature, The Butterfly Lion.*

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching symbolism in children's literature presents a unique challenge for educators, as young readers often struggle with abstract thinking and metaphorical interpretation. Symbolism requires the ability to recognize that an object, character, or event represents something beyond its literal meaning. Traditional methods of teaching symbolism—such as teacher-led explanations, text underlining, and group discussions—have proven effective to some extent, but they often fail to fully engage digital-native students who have grown up surrounded by technology [Prensky M. 2001, p. 2]. The rapid development of digital technologies has opened new possibilities for teaching literary concepts in more interactive, visual, and student-centered ways. Interactive applications, digital storytelling platforms, artificial intelligence tools, and multimedia presentations can transform abstract symbolic meanings into tangible, engaging learning experiences [Gee J.P. 2003, p. 48]. These innovative methods not only capture students' attention but also cater to diverse learning styles, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic preferences.

This article examines the effectiveness of innovative digital methods for teaching symbolism in children's literature using a case study of Michael Morpurgo’s “The Butterfly Lion.” This particular work was chosen because it contains clear, powerful symbols—the butterfly representing change, freedom, and the transient nature of beauty, and the lion representing loyalty, courage, and strength—that are accessible to young readers yet rich enough for deeper analysis [Morpurgo M. 1996, p. 12]. The novel's concise narrative and emotional depth make it an ideal text for introducing symbolism to elementary and middle school students. The main objectives of this article are: 1) to analyze the key symbols present in “The Butterfly Lion”; 2) to explore various innovative digital methods that can be used to teach these symbols; 3) to evaluate the pedagogical benefits and potential challenges of using digital tools in symbolism instruction; and 4) to provide practical recommendations for educators seeking to integrate technology into their literature lessons. The central argument is that a digitally-enhanced approach to teaching symbolism significantly improves students' motivation,

abstract thinking, and analytical skills compared to traditional methods alone [Tapscott D. 2009, p. 87].

### **MAIN PART**

#### **Key Symbols in “The Butterfly Lion”**

Michael Morpurgo’s “The Butterfly Lion” tells the story of a young boy named Bertie who rescues a white lion cub in Africa, only to be separated from it when he is sent to boarding school in England. The narrative weaves together themes of friendship, loss, loyalty, and the enduring power of childhood promises. Two central symbols dominate the novel: the butterfly and the lion. The butterfly symbolizes transformation, fleeting beauty, and the possibility of miraculous change. In the story, Bertie sees a butterfly at crucial moments—most notably when he reunites with the lion years later and when the lion eventually dies. The butterfly’s short lifespan mirrors the temporary nature of happiness and the inevitability of loss, yet its appearance also suggests hope and the continuation of the soul [Morpurgo M. 1996, p. 54].

The lion, specifically the white lion, symbolizes unwavering loyalty, courage, and the bond between humans and animals. Bertie’s promise to the lion—that he will never forget it—becomes a moral compass for his entire life. The lion’s whiteness sets it apart as something rare and magical, emphasizing the extraordinary nature of true friendship. Even after the lion’s death, its memory lives on through the butterfly, connecting the two symbols into a unified message about love transcending physical boundaries [Morpurgo M. 1996, p. 78]. Understanding these symbols requires students to move beyond literal comprehension and engage in inferential thinking. For example, when Bertie says, “He came back as a butterfly,” students must grasp that Morpurgo is not suggesting biological transformation but rather spiritual continuity and the power of memory. This is precisely where digital methods can provide crucial support.

#### **Interactive Applications for Symbol Visualization**

One of the most effective digital tools for teaching symbolism is interactive applications such as Padlet, Mentimeter, and Nearpod. These platforms allow students to create visual mood boards, mind maps, and collaborative diagrams that represent their interpretations of symbols [Kukulka-Hulme A. 2005, p. 67]. For “The Butterfly Lion,” teachers can design an activity where students use Padlet to post images, short videos, or drawings that they associate with the butterfly and the lion. One student might post a picture of a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly to illustrate change, while another might upload a lioness protecting her cub to represent loyalty. The teacher then guides the class in discussing why certain images were chosen and how they connect to the text. This process transforms passive reading into active meaning-making.

Nearpod offers interactive quizzes and virtual reality field trips. For instance, students could take a VR tour of the African savanna or an English countryside to better understand the contrasting settings in which the symbols appear. Research indicates that such immersive experiences enhance emotional engagement and long-term retention of literary concepts [Prensky M. 2005, p. 34].

#### **Digital Storytelling and Animation**

Digital storytelling involves students creating their own short videos, animations, or narrated slideshows that retell or reinterpret key scenes from the novel. Free tools such as Canva, Animoto, and Scratch make this accessible even for young learners with limited technical skills [Lambert J. 2010, p. 92]. A particularly effective assignment for “The Butterfly Lion” is asking students to animate the moment when the butterfly

appears at the lion's deathbed. Students must decide how to visually represent the butterfly's symbolic meaning—should it glow? Should it transform into the lion's spirit? Should sad or hopeful music accompany the scene? Through these creative choices, students internalize the concept of symbolism more deeply than through traditional essay writing alone.

Furthermore, digital storytelling supports differentiated instruction. Struggling readers can focus on visual expression, while advanced students can incorporate voice-over narration that explicitly analyzes the symbols. All students, regardless of their literacy level, have an opportunity to demonstrate understanding [Gee J.P. 2007, p. 128].

### **Artificial Intelligence as a Teaching Assistant**

Recent advances in artificial intelligence, including chatbots like ChatGPT and image generators like DALL-E, offer unprecedented opportunities for teaching symbolism. These tools can serve as interactive tutors, brainstorming partners, or creative collaborators [Luckin R. 2018, p. 45]. For example, after reading a chapter of "The Butterfly Lion," students could ask ChatGPT, "What does the white lion symbolize in this story?" The AI generates a response that students then compare with their own ideas, discussing similarities and differences. More advanced students might ask follow-up questions such as, "How would the meaning change if the lion were black instead of white?" or "Can you find other books where animals symbolize loyalty?"

Image generation tools allow students to visualize abstract symbols. A student who struggles to articulate what the butterfly represents could type a prompt like, "A glowing blue butterfly flying over a sad boy and a sleeping white lion, magical realism style." The generated image becomes a starting point for discussion and writing. However, teachers must guide students to use AI critically, recognizing that AI interpretations are based on patterns in data, not genuine literary understanding [Williamson B. 2019, p. 112].

### **Multimedia Presentations and Gamification**

Tools like PowerPoint with embedded video, Prezi for non-linear presentations, and Kahoot! for game-based learning can transform a standard symbolism lesson into an engaging multimedia experience. A teacher might create a Prezi presentation where clicking on the lion reveals quotes about loyalty from the text, while clicking on the butterfly reveals quotes about change and loss. Gamification involves adding game-like elements such as points, levels, badges, and leaderboards. For "The Butterfly Lion," teachers could design a digital escape room where students must correctly answer symbolism questions to "unlock" the next chapter of the story. Each correct answer about the butterfly or lion brings them closer to reuniting Bertie with his lion. Studies show that gamification increases student engagement, motivation, and time-on-task in literacy instruction [Kapp K.M. 2012, p. 76].

### **Pedagogical Benefits and Challenges**

The benefits of innovative digital methods for teaching symbolism are substantial. First, digital tools cater to multiple learning styles simultaneously, ensuring that visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners all have access points to abstract concepts. Second, digital methods increase student motivation because they align with the technology-rich environments students inhabit outside school. Third, collaborative digital activities foster communication and peer learning, as students must articulate and defend their symbolic interpretations [Jenkins H. 2009, p. 54].

However, challenges remain. Access to devices and reliable internet is not universal, potentially exacerbating educational inequalities. Some teachers lack training in digital pedagogy and may feel intimidated by new technologies. Additionally, poorly designed digital activities can distract rather than educate, turning literature lessons into mere entertainment [Selwyn N. 2016, p. 28].

To address these challenges, schools should invest in infrastructure and professional development. Teachers need practical workshops that model specific, ready-to-use digital activities for texts like “The Butterfly Lion.” Furthermore, digital methods should supplement, not replace, traditional close reading and discussion. The goal is integration, not substitution.

### CONCLUSION

This article has examined innovative digital methods for teaching symbolism in children’s literature using Michael Morpurgo’s “The Butterfly Lion” as a case study. The analysis demonstrates that interactive applications, digital storytelling, artificial intelligence tools, and multimedia presentations can significantly enhance students’ understanding of abstract symbolic meanings. The butterfly (changeability, hope, transient beauty) and the lion (loyalty, courage, enduring love) become more accessible when students can visualize them, manipulate them in creative projects, and discuss them through collaborative digital platforms. The pedagogical benefits are clear: increased motivation, improved abstract thinking, support for diverse learning styles, and opportunities for differentiated instruction. Students who might struggle with traditional essay writing can excel at creating digital stories or participating in gamified quizzes. Furthermore, digital tools prepare students for a future in which technological literacy is as fundamental as reading and writing. Nevertheless, challenges related to access, teacher training, and potential distraction must be addressed through thoughtful implementation. Digital methods should be viewed as powerful supplements to, rather than replacements for, traditional literary analysis. The most effective approach integrates teacher-led discussion, close reading, and writing with carefully selected digital activities that directly support learning objectives.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of digital symbolism instruction on reading comprehension and critical thinking. Comparative studies between traditional and digitally-enhanced classrooms would provide empirical evidence to guide educators. Additionally, as artificial intelligence continues to evolve, new pedagogical models will be needed to help students use AI critically and creatively.

In conclusion, teaching symbolism in children’s literature through innovative digital methods is not merely a trend but a meaningful pedagogical shift that responds to the realities of 21st-century education. “The Butterfly Lion,” with its rich yet accessible symbols, serves as an excellent text for implementing these methods. By embracing technology thoughtfully, educators can transform the way young readers encounter and internalize the profound power of literary symbolism.

### REFERENCES

1. Gee J. P. *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 225 p.
2. Gee J. P. *Good Video Games and Good Learning: Collected Essays on Video Games, Learning and Literacy*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 206 p.

3. Jenkins H. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009. 145 p.
4. Kapp K. M. *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction: Game-Based Methods and Strategies for Training and Education*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2012. 336 p.
5. Kukulska-Hulme A. *Mobile Usability in Educational Contexts: What Have We Learnt?* London: Open University Press, 2005. 189 p.
6. Lambert J. *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*. Berkeley: Digital Diner Press, 2010. 204 p.
7. Luckin R. *Machine Learning and Human Intelligence: The Future of Education for the 21st Century*. London: UCL Institute of Education Press, 2018. 178 p.
8. Morpurgo M. *The Butterfly Lion*. London: HarperCollins Children's Books, 1996. 128 p.
9. Prensky M. *Digital Game-Based Learning*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001. 442 p.
10. Prensky M. "Engaging Students Through Digital Storytelling." *Educational Technology*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2005, pp. 32-38.
11. Selwyn N. *Is Technology Good for Education?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016. 168 p.
12. Tapscott D. *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009. 384 p.
13. Williamson B. *Big Data in Education: The Digital Future of Learning, Policy and Practice*. London: SAGE Publications, 2019. 236 p.