

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Symbols **Sample Answers** *Evidence and Analysis*

Directions: Describe or use a quote to identify three instances in which each symbol appears in *The Handmaid's Tale*, and write a short paragraph describing the context and significance of that appearance. Then write a longer paragraph analyzing the broader meaning of the symbol in *The Handmaid's Tale*.



The Color Red

| Quote or Description | Context and Significance |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |

Meaning of the Symbol

The color red appears constantly in the novel. Red is the color of the Handmaids, a color associated both with shame (think of *The Scarlet Letter*) and with ripeness and fertility. **Offred** expands the color's symbolic power, using it to describe blood, sometimes as the life force that courses through her body, and sometimes as a marker of violence and death, like the blood on the executed criminals. One of the most common uses of the color is to describe the tulips in **Serena Joy's** garden. The flowers are sex organs, but their flourishing will be futile, since Serena Joy snips off their fruits.

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The Eye

| Quote or Description | Context and Significance |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |

Meaning of the Symbol

The novel is filled with eyes, which represent key topics like paranoia, surveillance, and Gilead's authority. The Eyes are the terrifying, violent and secretive enforcers of Gilead's laws. As Offred worries that anyone she meets, from the **doctor to Ofglen**, might be an Eye, she also sees eyes everywhere, from a tour guide's badge to her own ankle tattoo. The most complex eye in the book is the plastered-over light socket in Offred's room, which Offred imagines as a blinded eye. Later she learns that the previous Handmaid hanged herself from the light fixture that used to be there, so that blinded eye comes to signify death and freedom as well.

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Makeup

| Quote or Description | Context and Significance |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |

Meaning of the Symbol

Makeup contains many contradictions relating to power and sexuality. It signifies femininity, the past, and **Offred**'s lost freedom to control her appearance. But others, like the **Commander**, think that the lack of makeup is actually a source of freedom, since women now don't have to use their appearances to compete for mates. Still, the Commander enjoys going to Jezebel's, where every woman wears makeup with the hopes of attracting business. Handmaids especially shouldn't attempt to be beautiful, which would add another layer of difficulty for the Wives and Commanders they serve. Yet Offred does her best to maintain her appearance, carefully saving her butter as moisturizing lotion, even in a house with no mirrors.