**USING THE SIFT METHOD OF LITERARY ANALYSIS**

When exploring how a writer uses literary elements and stylistic techniques to convey meaning or theme, the following technique will help readers to practice their literary analysis.

**Symbol:** examine the title and text for symbolism

**Images:** identify images and sensory details

**Figures of Speech:** analyze figurative language and other devices

**Tone and Theme:** discuss how all devices reveal tone or theme

**Symbol:** Since the title of a short story, novel, or poem often contains symbols that hint at theme, students should look at the title first and then the text.

**Images:** Writers use language to create sensory impressions and to evoke specific responses to characters, objects, events, or situations in their works. The writer “shows” rather than “tells,” thus allowing the reader to participate in the experience more fully. Therefore, imagery helps to produce mood and tone. When reading a piece containing imagery, students can ask themselves two questions: *What do I see, hear, taste, smell, or feel? What effect is the author trying to convey with these images?*

**Figures of Speech:** Writers form images by using figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, and personification, and writers employ other devices as well, all contributing to effect and meaning.

**Tone and Theme:** A close examination of word choice, imagery, and detail reveals the narrator’s attitude or tone and contributes to the reader’s understanding. To determine theme, you might: *Summarize* the story; *List* the subject or subjects that emerge from the summaries; *Write a sentence* about each subject listed based on insights gained from analyzing symbolism, imagery, figurative language, and other devices. Because all rhetorical and literary devices lead to *tone* and *theme,* this process will help you to perceive what insights about life the author is revealing about each subject and to refine the process of determining meaning in a text.