

# **“THE SCARLET IBIS”**

**BY JAMES HURST**

**“At times I was mean to Doodle. One day I took him up to the barn loft and showed him his casket, telling him how we all believed he would die.”**

# “THE SCARLET IBIS”

- **A story about two brothers**
  - The Narrator – Older brother
  - “Doodle” – Younger brother who has a severe physical disability
- **What is an Ibis?**
  - A long-legged water bird related to the heron, crane, and stork. Ibises eat plants, small shellfish, and mollusks.
  - Natural habitat is northern South America and islands in the Caribbean like Trinidad and Tobago.
  - Ancient Egyptians worshipped the sacred Ibis of Northern Africa, a relative of the scarlet ibis in this story. Altogether there are about 20 different species of Ibis.





# “THE SCARLET IBIS”

- **Symbolism – What is a symbol?**
  - A simple image that represents a much more complex concept or idea.
  - A symbol is an object, person, animal, location, temporal element, number, color, or event that stands for something more than itself.

# WHAT IS A SYMBOL?

- Consider the idea of a skull and crossbones. What does it traditionally symbolize?



# WHAT IS A SYMBOL?

- Now think of the image of a shamrock. What does this traditionally symbolize?



## **SYMBOLS OPERATE ON THREE LEVELS**

- **UNIVERSAL**
- **LOCAL/CONSTRUCTED IN THE PARTICULAR WORK OF ART**
- **CULTURAL**

**SYMBOLS ARE OPEN TO INTERPRETATION!**

# SYMBOLS

- In literature, symbols add deeper levels of meaning to a piece of writing.
- Pay attention to how the author uses symbols in this story to move us deeply as readers.



# SUMMARY

- The story's 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator relates a story from his past.
- His little brother, Doodle, is born physically disabled. Doodle is expected to die, yet he lives.
- The narrator must care for his brother, taking him everywhere in a go-cart.
- He is often frustrated by this burden, but after much effort he succeeds in teaching Doodle how to walk.
- Proud of this success, the narrator works to teach him how to run, swim, climb trees, and fight.



# SUMMARY CONT.

- In a symbolic episode that foreshadows the story's tragic resolution, Doodle buries a fallen bird – the brilliant, scarlet ibis.
- Later that day, the strain of trying to learn physical skills leaves Doodle gravely weakened.
- In the final scene, Doodle collapses and dies while running to catch up with his brother, who left him in the middle of a thunderstorm.
- The narrator feels guilt for his brother's death and he discovers too late the extent of his feelings for his brother.