

# Chrysanthemums and its symboli essay



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## “ The Chrysanthemums” and Its Symbolism

John Steinbeck uses symbolism to give alternate meanings to his short story “ Chrysanthemums.” A symbol is a device used to suggest more than its literary meaning. He uses these symbols to look further into the characters and their situations. The character Elisa has a garden, which is more than just a garden, and the chrysanthemums that she tends are more than just flowers. There are actions that she performs in the story, which also have other meanings.

Elisa is a country housewife. She is semi-distant from her husband and greatly distant from the world around her. She is a homebody, meaning that she rarely leaves the boundaries of her home and she has a lot of time and energy being built up. She uses some of this energy to clean up her house, but most of it is spent on her flower garden. Her garden is a place of solitude. It’s her own little world where she can let herself go and be the person that she wants to be. Her feminine side is brought out in her garden, the nurturer for the chrysanthemums, a mother almost to them. When the tinkerer comes to her home and into her garden he shows interest in her chrysanthemums. She takes this also as an interest in her as well. The garden in other words is a symbol for her femininity and womanhood.

The chrysanthemums are also seen as a symbol for her heart. Her existence seemed drab, dull and inevitable. She wanted to travel the world but she knew that she should not leave her husband. She felt that her husband wasn’t taken enough care of her personally so she took care of herself in the form of her chrysanthemums. She meticulously trimmed them and

transplanted them with intense care. The type of care that she felt was missing from her marriage. Later on in the story when she gives the

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tinkerer a couple of her seedlings, she is giving him a piece of herself to take with him. It was a way for her to escape her captivity of the ranch.

Another element found in the story is her bath. This is not only the cleansing of her physical body but of her internal being as well. She has always been dressed in a masculine fashion. In a way, she wanted equality. She wanted the same respect that men had. After the tinkerer came and left, she knew that she was a woman and realized that she didn't need to be masculine to gain respect. She also realized that she needed to be more feminine. “ In the bathroom she tore off her soiled clothes and flung them into a corner. And then she scrubbed herself with a block of pumice, legs and thighs, loins and chest and arms, until her skin was scratched and red.” When she had completed her ritual she felt a new sense of strength; not a masculine strength but a feminine strength.

At the end of the story, Elisa sees her seedlings that she had given the tinkerer lying on the roadside. This not only tells of the man wanting nothing but money, but it also tells a fortune to Elisa. It foretells her that she is to forever live in a passionate marriage. A marriage that is equal, in her eyes, to being “ like an old woman.”

There are many other symbols in the Chrysanthemums and there are many ways to interpret them. Having such symbolism in a short story adds intrigue

and excitement. It gives the reader a chance to find further meaning and importance to the authors writing.