
The Scarlet Ibis by James Hurst

James Hurst creates *The Scarlet Ibis* with an abundance of many literary devices, but the main device is a symbolism. Nature and the Color red are the main symbols that Hurst uses in his short story.

The Scarlet Ibis is a bird that Doodle finds lying on the ground dead beside the bleeding tree. It was not a common bird where they lived, so it must have traveled a great distance before dying. This is a symbol in many ways that illustrates Doodle. Just as a Scarlet Ibis traveling a great distance, Doodle also accomplishes a great number of things including surviving birth against all odds, and learning how to walk when the doctor said that he would never be able to. Along with this, both Doodle and the bird's life were shorter than expected.

Throughout the story, Hurst makes references to the color red which not only symbolizes death but also foreshadows Doodle's Death. The first encounter with this tragic color can be found in the second paragraph when Hurst describes Doodle after being born as a "tiny body which was red." Hurst uses this symbolism to warn the reader of Doodle's upcoming death. Later, Hurst uses the Scarlet Ibis, a red bird, which dies at the feet of the bleeding tree. The last occasion in the story that Hurst uses the color red to symbolize death is at the end when Doodle dies. "He had been bleeding from the mouth, and his neck and the front of his shirt were stained a brilliant red," (page 6).

Hurst uses this last symbolic phrase to describe Doodle's death but instead of illustrating the color red as terrible he described it as brilliant. He does this to relate the Scarlet Ibis' graceful, beautiful death to Doodle's Death. Nature is a recurring motif throughout this story. The beauty of the natural world enhances Doodle and the narrator's lives. There are recurring descriptions of places such as the Old Woman Swamp, Horsehead Landing, and the family house itself, before and after the events of the story. Doodle is enthralled by the beauty of the wildflowers in the swamp the very first time he visits. This recurring nature motif connects Doodle to the ibis and to the natural world itself, and accentuates the beauty of his life, though it is very different from the lives of most children his age. The color red is a powerful motif throughout this text. The title itself is "The Scarlet Ibis," and scarlet is a shade of red. The ibis perches in the bleeding tree, which reminds readers of the color red as well. When Doodle dies, his blood stains his skin and his shirt red. Aside from these obvious references, the narrator also describes Doodle's body as red when he is a baby: "a tiny body which was red and shriveled" (Part I). In this story, the color red symbolizes death—however, it also symbolizes beauty, through the beautiful ibis, its tree, and nature. This may seem paradoxical, but it is a fitting representation of the jumble of contradictions that comprise Doodle's life.

There is a reason why Doodle is so reluctant to reach out and touch the casket that was built for him as a baby when his brother brings him into the barn and tries to force him to. The casket is a symbol for the death that Doodle evaded, and he fears that if he physically connects with it he is inviting death back into his life. The casket represents what was supposed to happen to Doodle, but which, by some strange trick of fate, did not.