

Module 2: Self-Discovery Through Change and Rebirth


Topic 2 Content: Analysis of Gilgamesh

Introduction

Analysis of Gilgamesh

- Themes
- Symbols
- Imagery
- Figures of Speech

Introduction



The Epic of Gilgamesh is written in prose as well as poetic verse. As the narrator describes the characters and the events within the epic, vivid language and comparisons are used. This allows you to gain a visual of the characters, settings, and the events. It provides you with insight into the character's emotions. It gives you an opportunity to engage in a deeper analysis and understanding as well as go beyond the surface and create meaning. In this interactivity, explore an analysis of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Make sure to click on each of the tabs to learn details about the themes, symbols, imagery, and figures of speech.

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Themes

The screenshot shows a digital interface titled "Analysis of Gilgamesh". On the left, there is a vertical sidebar with three buttons: "Themes", "Symbols", and "Figures of Speech". The "Themes" button is selected, and the main content area on the right displays text under the heading "Themes". The text includes a question about detecting themes and three thematic sections: "Civilization vs. Wilderness", "Mortality vs. Immortality", and "Self-Discovery". A vertical scrollbar is visible on the right side of the text area.

Themes

Several themes exist in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Were you able to detect all of the underlying themes?

Civilization vs. Wilderness

The first instance in which you see the contrast between civilization and wilderness is with Enkidu and Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh is part man and part god. His appearance and physical strength cause him to stand out in Uruk. Enkidu, who was created in a hearth in the forest, has a savage-like appearance.

Mortality vs. Immortality

After Gilgamesh experiences the death of Enkidu, he decides to go on a quest for immortality. He becomes afraid of death because he knows that he will have to face it one day. Gilgamesh may be two-thirds god, but he is also one-third man and death is inevitable. As he searches for immortality, he is faced with his weaknesses and ultimately comes to terms with his weaknesses as well as fate. Gilgamesh realizes his imperfections and understands his mortality.

Self-Discovery

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Self-Discovery

It is the befriending of Enkidu and the experiencing of Enkidu's death that motivates Gilgamesh to begin his journey. Although Gilgamesh's intention is to find the secret to eternal life, he

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actually finds himself. His journey ends where it begins: Uruk. However, Gilgamesh is experiencing Uruk through a fresh perspective.

Dreams and Destiny

Gilgamesh and Enkidu's fate is prophesied through dreams. Prior to Enkidu's arrival, his coming is revealed to Gilgamesh in a dream. Before Gilgamesh defeats Humbaba, Enkidu interprets two of Gilgamesh's dreams. After the first dream, he informs Gilgamesh that Gilgamesh will be a king but will not have eternal life. After the second dream, he solidifies Gilgamesh's defeat of Humbaba. Enkidu is not only an interpreter of dreams; he has dreams of forewarning: consequences of killing Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven and Enkidu's death.

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Symbols

The screenshot shows a digital interface titled "Analysis of Gilgamesh". On the left is a sidebar with four navigation buttons: "Themes", "Symbols", "Imagery", and "Figures of Speech". The "Symbols" button is highlighted. The main content area on the right is titled "Symbols" and contains the following text:

Symbols are things, people, places, and events that represent something else. The following are examples of symbols that are present in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*:

The Number 7
The number seven represents completion. Within the epic, there are several instances in which the number seven is mentioned:

- The falling of Humbaba's *seven* cedars/splendors
- Humbaba's *seventh* and last blaze that is used to attack Gilgamesh and Enkidu
- Gilgamesh lamented over Enkidu's death for *seven* days and *seven* nights
- The last day in which Utnapishtim finished building the boat
- The end of the flood
- Gilgamesh awakens as the *seventh* loaf is cooking
- *Seven* wise men who built the foundation of the wall of Uruk

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Normally the serpent is known to symbolize evil or deceit. However, within this epic the serpent symbolizes renewal. The serpent takes the plant of eternal life from Gilgamesh while he is sleeping. After eating this plant, the serpent sheds its old skin and new skin returns.

Samhat the "harlot"

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Samhat is a gatekeeper of worldly knowledge and a tamer. She also represents weakness. It is through intimacy with Samhat that Enkidu gains knowledge of himself and his journey. Some of his animal nature is taken away, and he has been humanized. Through her seduction, Enkidu's awareness and perception increases.

Flood (Rebirth)

Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh the story of the flood. He informs Gilgamesh that the gods were upset with mankind and their behavior and decide to exterminate all of mankind. After the flood which lasted six days and seven nights, Utnapishtim was blessed by the gods and granted eternal life. The flood was a way to create a new Earth as well as a new human race.

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Imagery

Analysis of Gilgamesh

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Imagery

Imagery is the author's use of certain words to create a mental picture. These words appeal to the five senses: sight, taste, touch, hearing, and smell. Since you did not read the exact tablets from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, here are some examples of how imagery is used.

Sight
"His body was rough, he had long hair like a woman's; it waved like the hair of Nisaba, the goddess of corn. His body was covered with matted hair like Samuqan's, the god of cattle" (63).

Touch
"There is a plant that grows under the water, it has a prickle like a thorn, like a rose; it will wound your hands" (116).

Taste
"Seeing it he went down at once, for there was fruit of Carnelian with the vine hanging from it, fruit, sweet to see" (100).

Smell
"But this man before whom you walked, bringing him here, whose

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Taste

"Seeing it he went down at once, for there was fruit of Carnelian with the vine hanging from it, fruit, sweet to see" (100).

Smell

"But this man before whom you walked, bringing him here, whose body is covered with foulness and the grace of whose limbs has been spoiled by wild skins, take him to the washing place" (115).

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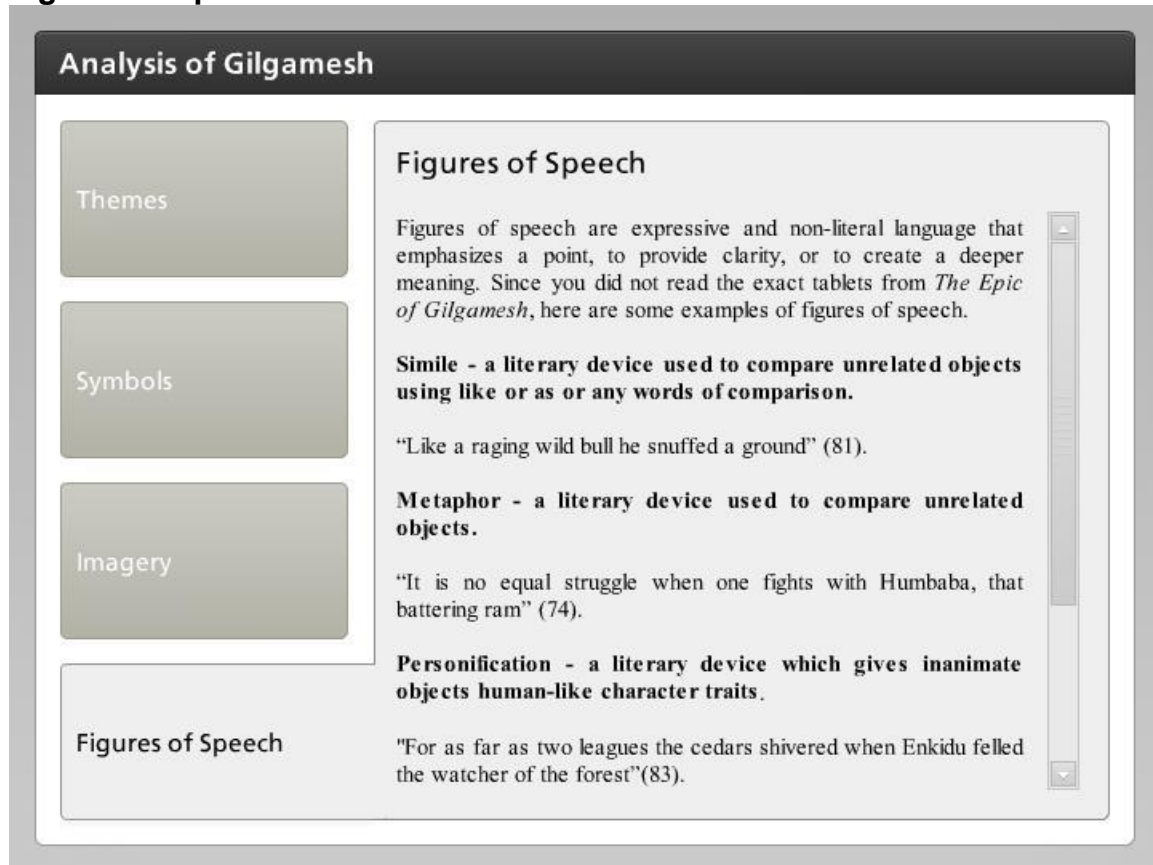
Hearing

“The eight winds rose up against Humbaba” (81).

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Figures of Speech



Analysis of Gilgamesh

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Figures of Speech

Figures of speech are expressive and non-literal language that emphasizes a point, to provide clarity, or to create a deeper meaning. Since you did not read the exact tablets from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, here are some examples of figures of speech.

Simile - a literary device used to compare unrelated objects using like or as or any words of comparison.

"Like a raging wild bull he snuffed a ground" (81).

Metaphor - a literary device used to compare unrelated objects.

"It is no equal struggle when one fights with Humbaba, that battering ram" (74).

Personification - a literary device which gives inanimate objects human-like character traits.

"For as far as two leagues the cedars shivered when Enkidu felled the watcher of the forest"(83).

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Apostrophe - a literary device used to address a person or inanimate thing as if it were alive, present, or able to respond.

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“You there, wood of the gate, dull and insensible, witless, I searched for you over twenty leagues until I saw the towering cedar” (90).