

# **FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE**

*Discovering Voice*  
**Nancy Dean (2006)**

The one tree in Francie's yard was neither a pine nor a hemlock. It had pointed leaves which grew along green switches which radiated from the bough and made a tree which looked like a lot of open green umbrellas. Some people called it the Tree of Heaven. No matter where its seed fell, it made a tree which struggled to reach the sky. It grew in boarded-up lots and out of neglected rubbish heaps and it was the only tree that grew out of cement. It grew lushly, but only in the tenement districts.

(Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*)

1. Remember that a symbol is itself *and* something else—usually abstract. This paragraph is about a tree, but what else is it about?

2. How would this passage be different if Smith had used a simile instead of symbolism, like this?

**Francie's spirit was like a tree with pointed leaves which grew along green switches which radiated from the bough and made a tree which looked like a lot of open green umbrellas. She always tried to rise above her troubles like a Tree of Heaven which struggles to reach the sky, no matter where its seed falls.**

**(Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*)**

# You try it . . .

3. Think of a plant that symbolizes your spirit. Write a paragraph which develops that plant as a symbol. Don't compare the plant to anything; instead, talk about the plant in such a way that the reader understands you are also talking about your spirit. Yes, this is a difficult task.