

Why does Masonry use symbols?

Everyone uses symbols every day, just as we do ritual. We use them because they communicate quickly. When you see a stop sign, you know what it means, even if you can't read the word "stop." The circle and line mean "don't" or "not allowed." In fact, using symbols is probably the oldest way of communication and the oldest way of teaching.

Masonry uses symbols for the same reason. Some form of the "Square and Compasses" is the most widely used and known symbol of Masonry. In one way, this symbol is a kind of trademark for the fraternity, as the "golden arches" are for McDonald's. When you see the Square and Compasses on a building, you know that Masons meet there.

And like all symbols, they have a meaning.

The Square symbolizes things of the earth, and it also symbolizes honor, integrity, truthfulness, and the other ways we should relate to this world and the people in it. The Compasses symbolize things of the spirit, and the importance of a well-developed spiritual life, and also the importance of self-control -- of keeping ourselves within bounds. The G stands for Geometry, the science which the ancients believed most revealed the glory of God and His works in the heavens, and it also stands for God, Who must be at the center of all our thoughts and of all our efforts.

The meanings of most of the other Masonic symbols are obvious. For example, the gavel teaches the importance of self-control and self-discipline. The hour-glass teaches us that time is always passing, and we should not put off important decisions.