

# Why Miniatures: Symbolism in Miniature

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The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

Tucson, Arizona

Miniatures are a great way to communicate non-verbally. Messaging in miniature can be simple and obvious, like placing a small American flag in a room box or a miniature landscape to demonstrate your patriotism, or more complex, as when we use the language of color to decorate a miniature and subtly suggest a mood or emotion.

We often talk of using balance and symmetry in a miniature to give a sense of unity and coherence. We may use repetition to create rhythm, or asymmetry to make our miniatures more active and alive. All of these techniques for using inanimate objects to communicate a subliminal message are really just the use of symbolization. Our ability to use symbols to create meaning sets us apart from all other creatures. Writing systems, numbering systems, maps and models are all ways we use symbolism to communicate.

Scale models are often used as teaching tools to demonstrate concepts and outcomes, and to allow students to formulate questions and test hypotheses before actually encountering the problem or experience in real time at full size. As young children develop reasoning skills they learn to differentiate between the dual representation of a model as an object in itself and as a representation, or symbol, of something larger.



*The Mapmaker.* Marcia Backstrom & Janet Middlebrook.  
Acq. 1990s. Photo by Amy Haskell.

The next time you place a tiny white rose within a delicate display evoking the innocence of youth, think about your extensive, and nearly unconscious, vocabulary of symbols and how it enriches the art of miniatures you create for all to enjoy.

Nina Daldrup, Executive Director  
The Mini Time Machine Museum