



SYMBOLS  
& MOTIFS  
The Couch

Among *The Watsons'* most compelling symbols is the family's couch. We first meet the characters as they huddle up on its cushions, and the same prop plays a key role in the book's final chapter. But the Kenny who emerges from the "World-famous Watson Pet Hospital" is not the same kid he was on that cold day in the book's first chapter, and neither is Byron.

## Resilience

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Even though Byron joins the family huddle in Chapter 1, he won't fully accept its embrace, tucking the blanket between his body and the rest of the "Weird Watsons," even though creating the extra distance means sacrificing warmth. After the family's harrowing experience in Birmingham, however, the brothers have traded places; now Kenny is the one distancing himself. Here, the couch serves as both a barrier between Kenny and the rest of the family, but also a seam that holds them together, the spot where Byron ultimately finds a way to soothe his brother's pain. A symbol of family resilience in the face of suffering.

## Transformation

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The couch literally holds the family together. It keeps them warm. It does what it can to heal dying pets. Ultimately, though, it bears witness to the brothers' twin transformations, serving as a landmark around which the coming of age theme here drives the narrative. Indeed, to lure Kenny out of his hiding spot, Byron brings him to the bathroom mirror to show off a new whisker sprouting on his chin, a literal change signaling adolescence, and one that coincides with a maturation in perspective too, a reset of Byron's moral compass. The old Byron was too busy being a "juvenile delinquent" to see the big picture that his experience in Birmingham would soon bring into sharp relief, revealing the systemic roots of injustice, bitter truths that completely overwhelm his little brother. But the Byron we meet in the bathroom, comforting a distraught Kenny, has grown. He sees the world for what it is and he also sees the role he can play in softening its blows for a loved one. "You just gotta understand that that's the way it is," he tells Kenny, "and keep on steppin'."