**Standard language, language totem**

A **totem** is a spirit being, sacred object, or symbol that serves as an emblem of a group of [people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People), such as a [family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family), [clan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clan), [lineage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lineage_%28anthropology%29), or [tribe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribe). The totemic symbol may serve as a reminder of the [kin group's ancestry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veneration_of_the_dead) or mythic past. While the term "totem" is [Ojibwe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ojibwe_language) in origin, belief in [tutelary spirits and deities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tutelary_deity) is not limited to [indigenous peoples of the Americas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_peoples_of_the_Americas) but common to a number of cultures worldwide. [Totemistic beliefs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Totemism) are found in regions of Africa, Arabia, Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Arctic. Contemporary [neoshamanic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoshamanism), [New Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Age) and [mythopoetic men's movements](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythopoetic_men%27s_movement) not otherwise involved in the practice of a tribal religion may [appropriate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_appropriation) and use "totem" terminology for the personal identification with a tutelary spirit or [guide](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirit_guide).

**Native North American totems**

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pro-Independence_Flag_of_New_Caledonia.svg)

Cultural flag of the [Kanak community](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanak_people), showing a *flèche*

The word totem comes from the Ojibway word *dodaem* and means "brother/sister kin". It is the archetypal symbol, animal or plant of hereditary clan affiliations. People from the same clan have the same clan totem and are considered immediate family. It is taboo to marry someone of the same clan.

The Ojibway scholar Basil H. Johnston defines dodaem, or totem, as "that from which I draw my purpose, meaning, and being," and states that "the bonds that united the Ojibway-speaking people were the totems." He further asserts that the feeling of oneness among people that occupy a vast territory is based not on political, economic, or religious considerations but on totemic symbols that "made those born under the signs one in function, birth, and purpose." This means that men and women belonging to the same totem regarded one another as brothers and sisters having kinship obligations to each other.

In North America, there is a certain feeling of affinity between a kin group or clan and its totem. There are taboos against killing clan animals, as humans are kin to the animals whose totems they represent. In some cases, totem spirits are clan protectors and the center of religious activity.