



- >> **Swiss chocolate, wrist watches, and pocket knives are prime export items. But Heidi and William Tell are also household names all over the world. Why do these figures stand for Switzerland? What makes them special?**

Symbols and myths help us to talk about Switzerland and its role in the world: Who are we? Who do we want to be? How do we interact with one another? People are especially effective as means of getting abstract ideas across. Whether or not they ever actually lived is not always important.

Mythological characters

For a long time, William Tell was a legendary figure whose impact did not end at the Swiss borders. He embodied ideals like sturdiness, health, strength, bravery, and courage.

Helvetia can be regarded as the female counterpart to William Tell. Helvetia is especially adaptable and has been portrayed with different appearances and roles. Unlike William Tell, there is no biography of her – only the story of the many different ways in which she has been represented.²

- ① Select two of the portrayals on the following two pages.

a) What role is Helvetia playing in the images you chose?

Selection 1:

Selection 2:

b) What characteristics does she have in the pictures?

b) Compare the two portrayals and find similarities and differences.

Similarities

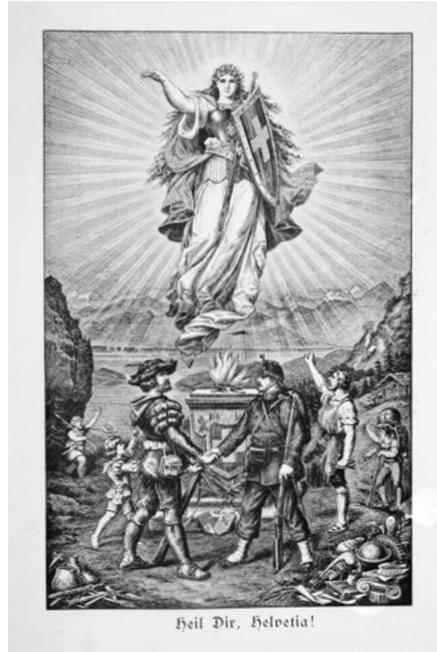
Differences

1) School materials "Ideen Schweiz", Swiss National Museum, 2016, p. 11 www.landesmuseum.ch/landesmuseum/schulmaterial/ideen-schweiz/ideen-schweiz-unterlagen-fuer-schulen.pdf
2) "Helvetia (Allegorie)", in: Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz: <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/016440/2014-10-13/>

3 People and mythological characters



Photograph. Helvetia with lance, flowers in her hair, and shield bearing the Swiss coat of arms. Johannes Meiner. 1896.



Graphic print. "Hail, Helvetia!" William Tell and a boy greeting an 1889 territorial soldier in front of the Altar of the Fatherland at Vitznau on Lake Lucerne. Appearing in the bottom corners are items representing early Switzerland and the nineteenth century. Helvetia floats above the scene as the protectress of Switzerland. 1889.

Graphic print. Motif appearing on the National Festival postcard from 1915: Helvetia leads a group of refugees through the snow while soldiers look on. Charles Henri van Muyden. 1915.



Postcard. Helpful Helvetia. Scene with soldiers on active service 1914–1918. Richard Salomon Weiss. 1915.



3 People and mythological characters



Lithograph. Print commemorating the occupation of the border, 1914/15. Swiss General Staff at a fortified section of the Jura border below the armed Helvetia in an aureole. 1915.



Postcard. Helvetia and girls in traditional Swiss cantonal dress walking along an S-shaped path. 1930–1965.



Left: Colour print. Woman in a trouser suit holding a cross-bow and a naked baby. Grundflum. 2004.



Right: Women federal councillors with Helvetia. Photographed on the occasion of the regular extra muros session of the Federal Council in the Zurich National Museum, 15 May 2019.



3 People and mythological characters



- ② What does it take for figures such as Helvetia or William Tell to be acknowledged as national symbols? What are the features that make them recognisable? What features could be replaced by modern-day objects?

Choose a method. Tick the one you have selected.

- Draw, paste, or design a Helvetia or a William Tell. Share a photo with your class or your teacher.
- Dress up as Helvetia or William Tell. What kind of clothing do you need? What props do you need? Share a photo of yourself in costume with your class or your teacher.



Historical personalities

- ③ Choose one of the historical personalities you saw in the video tour. Create a profile of him or her. If you need more information, research him or her on the Internet. You may also choose a different historical personality whom you consider typical of Swiss values or achievements.

What is the person's name?

How is the person described?

When did the person live?

What did the person do?

What goals and values did the person stand up for?

What did he or she achieve? How did he or she influence Switzerland? Explain.

Why did the person become a symbol of Switzerland? Give your reasons.

Why do you find this person remarkable? Give your views.

What questions would you ask this person if you could meet him or her?

Contemporary personalities

- ④ Choose a person from our own time who you think represents Switzerland or Swiss values.



A friend?



A relative?



A professional athlete?



A musician?



An influencer?

What is the person's name?

What does the person do?

What goals and values does the person stand up for?

What has he or she achieved so far? How has he or she influenced Switzerland so far? Explain.

Will the person remain important for Switzerland in the future? Give your views.

Why do you find this person remarkable? Give your views.

What questions would you ask this person if you could meet him or her?



Mister and Miss Swissness

Let's move away from historical personalities and modern-day heroes and create an entirely new symbolic figure that we could use on coins, billboards, or the national flag.

⑤ Choose a method. Tick the one you have selected.

- Create a collage.
- Create a drawing.
- Dress up or use make-up or props. Choose an appropriate background. Pose as Mr or Miss Swissness and create a selfie or a social media story about yourself.

Start by making a design before you create your project. Think about the following points:

- What message do you want to get across?
- What should your figure look like to qualify as a figure symbolic of Switzerland?
- What clothes should your figure wear?
- What props could enhance your figure's impact?