Layers of Meaning

Sometimes, words have more than one layer of meaning. They mean one thing—but they mean something else at the same time. In many cases, this is because they have both a **literal** and a **figurative** meaning. In this activity, you will analyze the literal and figurative meanings of the headline of the nonfiction article “Into the Dark Water.”

**LITERAL MEANING**

*Literal* means “following the ordinary or usual meaning of the words.” The literal meaning of a word is its straightforward, or factual, meaning; it’s what the dictionary says it means. The literal meaning of a word is its most basic and most obvious meaning.

Consider the literal meaning of “Into the Dark Water” to answer the questions in the boxes below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what <strong>literal</strong> “dark water” does the headline refer?</th>
<th>What and/or who <strong>literally</strong> went “into the dark water” during the <em>Titanic</em> disaster?</th>
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**FIGURATIVE MEANING**

When words are used *figuratively*, they are used to convey not a fact but an idea. A word’s figurative meaning communicates something beyond its dictionary definition.

One type of figurative language is *symbolism*, or the use of symbols. A symbol is an object, setting, event, animal, or person that on one level is itself, but that has another meaning as well. For example, the American flag is a piece of fabric with stars and stripes on it, but it also represents the United States and ideals like freedom, patriotism, and pride. In literature, the sun might be used as a symbol; it would be the literal sun, but it might also represent an idea like happiness or hope.

Consider the figurative meaning of the headline “Into the Dark Water” and fill in the boxes on the next page.
At the end of the article, the author writes, “Jack sank into a deep depression. And this time he could not pull himself out of the swirling blackness.” What is the **figurative** meaning of “swirling blackness”?

What is the connection between the “swirling blackness” mentioned at the end of the article and the headline “Into the Dark Water”?

Explain how each of the following **figuratively** went “into the dark water” after the Titanic disaster:

| Jack Thayer | J. Bruce Ismay | society/the world |

Now use your notes to help you answer the writing prompt on page 10:

What are the literal and figurative meanings of the headline “Into the Dark Water”? In other words, what does the “dark water” symbolize? Use details from the article and the sidebar in your response.

Use a separate sheet of paper for your answer.