

PREVIEW
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Allusions
in Literature
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Allusion

- An allusion is a reference to a person, event, place, work of art, or work of literature in a text.
- Commonly in literature, writers allude to Roman/Greek mythology, the Bible, Shakespearean plays, fairy tales, history, and culture.
- These references are typically brief and indirect.
- The writer will not explain the reference, so they are difficult to identify if you are unfamiliar with the reference being made.

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Example

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Example: The kids' playroom looked like
Godzilla came over and had a party.

The reference is to Godzilla, a fictional pop culture icon and monster known for causing destruction. Godzilla didn't literally come over and have a party; the writer is illustrating that the kids' playroom is a complete mess by using an allusion.

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The Purpose of Allusions

- Helps the reader understand information quickly, easily, and more in-depth because the writer connects what they want to say with something else that is already well-known.
- Requires the reader to make connections to the current topic with previous knowledge or forces readers to learn something new.
- Creates an “inside joke” or bond between the reader and the writer.
- Allusions are a form of figurative language because the writer uses phrases and words to get a message across without being literal.

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How to Understand Allusions

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Recognize: find the reference in the text
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Connect: make the connection where it comes from

Apply: apply it to the new literature where its being used

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Analyze: analyze how the meaning works in a different context
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Example

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Example: Johnny and Marc were as close of brothers as Mufasa and Scar.

Mufasa and Scar are both characters from the movie *The Lion King*. In the film, Mufasa and Scar are brothers, but also enemies who fight over the throne. Scar kills his brother and attempts to kill his nephew Simba. This allusion illustrates that Johnny and Marc are not close at all as brothers.

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Identifying Unknown Allusions

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- Allusions are difficult because they are based on background knowledge.
- You probably haven't seen every movie ever created, read every book ever written, or memorized every fact in history from the beginning of man kind...
- So can you identify an allusion if you've never heard it before?
- You can try!

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Helpful Hints

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- Look for odd phrasing that doesn't make sense in a

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- Look for capitalization in letters. This is NOT always true, but in a lot of cases, allusions refer to proper nouns, such as people and places. This means there's a good chance the allusion will start with a capital letter.

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Example

Example: Whenever my siblings are fighting, I tell them I'm Switzerland and watch movies alone in my room.

- The allusion here is Switzerland. During World War I and II, Switzerland remained neutral and did not get involved. In this sentence, the allusion means the speaker wants to remain out of the fight and not take any sides.
- Even if you did not know this information previously, you could identify that the word Switzerland does not make literal sense in the example and then determine its figurative meaning with quick research.

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Last Note

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Allusions can be based off of real **or** fictitious references.

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For example, writers can reference Gotham City (a made up town from the Batman series) or Mount Rushmore (a real memorial located in South Dakota).

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Name:

Date:

Allusions in Literature

An **allusion** is a reference to a person, event, place, work of art, or work of literature in a text.

Commonly in literature, writers allude to Roman/Greek mythology, the Bible, Shakespearean plays, fairy tales, history, culture, and more.

These references are typically brief and indirect; the writer will not explain the reference. This means, you might not always catch it, especially if you are unfamiliar with the reference being made.

Example: The kids' playroom looked like **Godzilla** came over and had a party.

The reference is to **Godzilla**, a fictional pop culture icon and monster known for causing destruction. **Godzilla** didn't literally come over and have a party in this scenario; the writer is illustrating that the kids' playroom is a complete mess by using an allusion.

So why even use allusions if not everyone will catch it?

- Helps the reader understand information quickly, easily, and more in-depth because the writer connects what they want to say with something else that is already well-known.
- Requires the reader to make connections to the current topic with previous knowledge or forces readers to learn something new.
- Creates an "inside joke" or bond between the reader and the writer.
- Allusions are a form of figurative language because the writer uses phrases and words to get a message across without being literal.

Allusions: What should you do with one when you see it?

Recognize, connect, apply, and analyze.

Example: Johnny and Marc were as close of brothers as Mufasa and Scar.

Mufasa and Scar are both characters from the movie *The Lion King*. In the film, Mufasa and Scar are brothers, but also enemies who fight over the throne. Scar kills his brother and attempts to kill his nephew Simba. This allusion illustrates that Johnny and Marc are not close at all as brothers.

Can you identify an allusion if you've never heard it before?

- Look for odd phrasing that doesn't make sense in a literal way.
- Look for capitalization in letters. This is NOT always true, but in a lot of cases, allusions refer to proper nouns, such as people and places. This means there's a good chance the allusion will start with a capital letter.

Consider the following example:

Whenever my siblings are fighting, I tell them I'm **Switzerland** and watch movies alone in my room.

The allusion here is Switzerland. During World War I and II, Switzerland remained neutral and did not get involved. In this sentence, the allusion means the speaker wants to remain uninvolved in his/her siblings' argument and will not take any sides.

Even if you did not know this information previously, you could identify the word Switzerland does not make literal sense in the example above. You could then determine its figurative meaning with quick research.

Lastly: allusions can be based on real or fictitious references. For example, writers can reference Gotham City (a made up town from the Batman series) or Mount Rushmore (a real memorial located in South Dakota).

Name:

Date:

Allusions Practice

Directions: Underline the allusion in each sentence below. Then, determine what the references allude to and explain their meaning.

Example: Shawn walked around smiling as if he was struck by Cupid's arrow.

Cupid is from Roman mythology, he is the god of love. He often shoots arrows at people to make them love each other. This means, Shawn is walking around looking like he is in love.

1. When Kayla arrived at the prom, everyone stopped talking as if Cinderella had just walked through the door.

2. Benjamin avoided Christmas carolers at all cost because he was a real Scrooge this time of year.

3. James confronted Georgia about stealing his bike, but the more Georgia spoke, the more James thought her nose would start growing.

4. Penelope was the Einstein of our class and always had her hand raised.

5. "You have work in an hour, Sleeping Beauty. It's time to get a move on!" My mom shouted at me at 2 in the afternoon.

6. I didn't understand the group I was put in. If this was Hogwarts, I was just placed in Slytherin.

7. My spidey senses were telling me that I had to go check on my friend Amanda.

8. Hunter was like Romeo when it came to relationships; he was always buying girls flowers and chocolates.

9. I wanted to stay mad at my dad, but he made me Mac and Cheese, knowing it was my Achilles' heel.

10. When I jumped at the opportunity to run the book club, Jessie told me to "Calm down, Katniss!"

11. My brother is a teenage Sasquatch, he's 6'3 with size 14 feet.

12. People were wearing squirrels on their heads, riding unicycles on the sidewalk, and speaking in a language that resembled a cheetah's growl. One woman had a flamingo on a leash! All I could murmur was, "We're not in Kansas anymore."

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13. My former best friend is Judas to me after she told the teacher that I cheated on the test.

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15. When I walked into the kitchen, my sister said, "Speak of the Devil..."

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16. I asked my dance teacher to give me more constructive criticism not knowing I would be opening Pandora's box.

17. I would never let my friend Grace babysit my pets because she is practically Cruella Deville.

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18. Hercules would be proud of the way the girls lifted the couch out of my apartment.

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19. The police knew Martin was as guilty as Hannibal Lecter.

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20. I was stranded at the gas station with no phone or wallet, hoping maybe I'd come across Genie's lamp.

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21. Julia is a real Sherlock; she once found my retainer in my gym locker because she figured I would take it out for gym class.

22. I knew I could count on Dalton to have my back because he's always been an Honest Abe.

23. When we walked into the toy store's backroom, we found the Holy Grail of toys and games.

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24. Coach Carson questioned each one of us individually about the missing equipment; you'd think we were in Salem the way everyone kept blaming each other.

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25. My teacher gave me an A on my art project and wrote "Nice going, Van Gogh" on the back!

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26. Anthony was thirteen years old—the middle child—and the bad seed of the family.

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27. Extracurricular activities are the golden ticket to getting into college.

28. You can't bring any outside snacks into the arena or the Stormtroopers will come after you.

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29. Mrs. Randall and Mr. Simon stole flowers from the school's greenhouse—Bonnie and Clyde style.

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30. You should see Ryleigh on a hot summer day when her hair looks like Medusa's.

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31. My basement is practically Hades now that my brother spends all of his time down there.

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32. We had to use a special language when we talked on the phone because I couldn't trust my mom not to Watergate us.

Allusions Practice Answer Key

Example: Shawn walked around smiling as if he was struck by Cupid's arrow.

Cupid is from Roman mythology, he is the god of love. He often shoots arrows at people to make them love each other. This means, Shawn is walking around looking like he is in love.

1. When Kayla arrived at the prom, everyone stopped talking as if Cinderella had just walked through the door. Cinderella is a Disney movie about a woman named Cinderella who attends a ball against her step mother's attempts to stop her. When Cinderella arrives, she is wearing a beautiful gown and glass slippers catching the eye of Prince Charming. This allusion is saying that Kayla looked gorgeous as she arrived at the dance.

2. Benjamin avoided Christmas carolers at all cost because he was a real Scrooge this time of year.

Ebenezer Scrooge is the protagonist of the novel *A Christmas Carol*. The character Scrooge hates Christmas and only cares about money, which is to say Benjamin is not a fan of Christmas.

3. James confronted Georgia about stealing his bike, but the more Georgia spoke, the more James thought her nose would start growing.

From the Disney film *Pinocchio*, if the live puppet Pinocchio tells a lie, his wooden nose begins to grow. In this sentence, James thinks Georgia is lying because he expects her nose to grow.

4. Penelope was the Einstein of our class and always had her hand raised.

Albert Einstein is a German physicist and is credited to be one of the smartest people of all time. This sentence is saying that Penelope was the smartest student in the class.

5. "You have work in an hour, Sleeping Beauty. It's time to get a move on!" My mom shouted at me at 2 in the afternoon.

Sleeping Beauty is from a classic fairy tale and Disney film where a young woman is cursed to be asleep for 100 years. The mom in the sentence above is implying her daughter has been asleep for a very long time.

6. I didn't understand the group I was put in. If this was Hogwarts, I was just placed in Slytherin.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is from the Harry Potter book series. There are four houses in the story and Slytherin is one of them. The narrator is saying that he/she was placed into a group of "bad" or "evil" kids because Slytherin is known for cunning and dark witches/wizards.

7. My spidey senses were telling me that I had to go check on my friend Amanda.

Spiderman (Peter Parker) is a famous superhero and the "spidey-sense" is his ability to sense and react to danger before it happens. This means the narrator has a feeling that her friend Amanda is in trouble.

8. Hunter was like Romeo when it came to relationships; he was always buying his girlfriend flowers and chocolates.

Romeo was a character in Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*, and was very romantic in expressing his love for Juliet. This means Hunter was a very romantic, loving boyfriend.

9. I wanted to stay mad at my dad, but he made me Mac and Cheese, knowing it was my Achilles' heel.

In Greek mythology, Achilles was a hero of the Trojan War and the greatest of all the Greek warriors; however, he had one weakness which was his heel (the Achilles tendon is the tissue that connects the calf muscles to the heel bone). Achilles' mother dipped him in the River Styx, making his entire body invincible except for the part of his foot where she held him. In this sentence, the narrator is saying Mac and Cheese is her/his weakness.

10. When I jumped at the opportunity to run the book club, Jessie told me to "Calm down, Katniss!"

Katniss is the protagonist of the book series *The Hunger Games*. The character Katniss Everdeen is most known for her brave decision to volunteer to fight to the death in place of her sister who was originally chosen. This sentence means Jessie was eager to be in charge and volunteered enthusiastically.

11. My brother is a teenage Sasquatch, he's 6'3 with size 14 feet.

Sasquatch, also called Bigfoot, is a large, hairy, monster believed by some people to exist in the northwestern United States and Canada. This sentence is implying the speaker's brother is huge because he is very tall with big feet.

12. People were wearing squirrels on their heads, riding unicycles on the sidewalk, and speaking in a language that resembled a cheetah's growl. One woman had a flamingo on a leash! All I could murmur was, "We're not in Kansas anymore."

This reference is from *The Wizard of Oz*, a classic movie from 1939 where protagonist Dorothy Gale is swept away from a farm in Kansas to a magical land of Oz in a tornado. Her infamous line, "We're not in Kansas anymore" is what she says to her dog once they arrive in Oz. The narrator in the sentence above is emphasizing that they are not in their hometown anymore and the people are strangely different.

13. My former best friend is Judas to me after she told the teacher that I cheated on the test.

Judas Iscariot was one of the Twelve Apostles in the Bible. He is notorious for betraying Jesus and getting Jesus arrested and executed. This line is showing that one friend betrayed another friend by telling the teacher what happened.

14. It rained so much this month, I thought we would have to start building an ark.

The ark refers to Noah's Ark from the Bible. God came to Noah and told him to build a ship to spare his life and his family's, and several animals. God then made it rain for forty days and forty nights causing a huge flood. In this case, the narrator is exaggerating that it was raining so much that they might need to build an ark to survive.

15. When I walked into the kitchen, my sister said, "Speak of the Devil."

The Devil is the personification of evil and the adversary of God and of all good people everywhere. The narrator is saying that her sister is calling her the devil, perhaps because they are siblings and siblings often fight.

16. I asked my dance teacher to give me more constructive criticism not knowing I would be opening Pandora's box.

In Greek mythology, the gods send Pandora a box and tell her never to open it. Out of curiosity, Pandora opens it. The box is filled with evils that are let loose into the world. In the sentence above, the narrator is saying she thought she wanted to hear what her dance teacher had to say, but it ended up being something she did not want and something she could not make go away.

17. I would never let my friend Grace babysit my pets because she is practically Cruella Deville.

Cruella Deville is the evil villain in Disney's *101 Dalmatians*. She is a vain fashion designer who wants to kill puppies to make a fur coat. In this reference, the narrator doesn't want her friend Grace to babysit her pets because she doesn't like animals or dogs.

18. Hercules would be proud of the way the girls lifted the couch out of my apartment.

Hercules is a hero in classical mythology best known as the strongest of all mortals, and even stronger than many gods. This sentence means that the girls were lifting the couch as if it was a very easy task, showing off their physical strength.

19. The police knew Martin was as guilty as Hannibal Lecter.

Hannibal is a fictional character in books, movies, and television, probably best known for the film *Silence of the Lambs*. He is a notorious cannibal and murderer. The allusion means that Martin is very guilty.

20. I was stranded at the gas station with no phone or wallet, hoping maybe I'd come across Genie's lamp.

In Disney's film *Aladdin*, Aladdin finds a magic lamp that belongs to a genie; if you rub the lamp, you are granted three wishes. This reference shows the narrator is wishing that he/she had three wishes in order to fix the problem he/she is having (being stranded with no money or phone).

21. Julia is a real Sherlock; she once found my retainer in my gym locker because she figured I would take it out for gym class.

Sherlock Holmes is a fictional private detective created by author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Sherlock is known for his intelligence, logical reasoning skills, and acute observations. This reference means that Julia is very smart and figured out the mystery of the missing retainer.

22. I knew I could count on Dalton to have my back because he's always been an Honest Abe.

"Honest Abe" was a nickname for president Abraham Lincoln, known for his honesty and integrity. This means the narrator considers Dalton someone he can depend on to tell him the truth.

23. When we walked into the toy store's backroom, we found the Holy Grail of toys and games. The Holy Grail is the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper and how St. Joseph of Arimathea collected Christ's blood. It is described as a treasure that is highly coveted. The toys in the back room of the store must be considered valuable or highly sought after by children in the sentence above.

24. Coach Carson questioned each one of us individually about the missing equipment; you'd think we were in Salem the way everyone kept blaming each other.

The Salem witch trials took place in 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts. The investigations consisted of little to no evidence, but multiple convictions out of fear. Many "witches" were hanged or imprisoned. This reference means the Coach was interrogating everyone intensely as if they were to be executed for lying, and people were pointing fingers at each other with no evidence or concern for the consequences.

25. My teacher gave me an A on my art project and wrote "Nice going, Van Gogh" on the back! Vincent van Gogh was a Dutch painter, generally considered to be one of the greatest of all time. The teacher in this story is paying a high compliment to the student.

26. Anthony was thirteen years old—the middle child—and the bad seed of the family.

In the Bible, the bad seed is a person who is dishonest, evil, or unprincipled by nature. Anthony is described to be the evil child or the bad kid in the family.

27. Extracurricular activities are the golden ticket to getting into college.

In the story "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," a golden ticket is the pass that allows someone to enter the highly desirable destination of Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory. This reference means you must participate in extracurricular activities in order to attend a collegiate institution.

28. You can't bring any outside snacks into the arena or the Stormtroopers will come after you.

A Stormtrooper is a fictional soldier in the Star Wars franchise. They are highly trained infantry soldiers who fight for the Empire (the bad guys). This reference is saying that there are strict security guards or employees of some sort who are on high alert and will punish you if you are caught bringing in snacks.

29. Mrs. Randall and Mr. Simon stole flowers from the school's greenhouse—Bonnie and Clyde style.

Bonnie and Clyde were a real American couple who committed crimes together, particularly bank robberies. Their infamous history has inspired many movies and films. This sentence is implying that Mrs. Randall and Mr. Simon are thieves who are stealing flowers in a way that is sneaky and wily.

30. You should see Ryleigh on a hot summer day when her hair looks like Medusa's.

Medusa was a monster from Greek mythology whose hair was made of snakes and could turn you to stone just by looking in your eyes. This reference is saying that Ryleigh's hair must become so wild, frizzy, and affected by the humidity of summer, that it looks like there are snakes in her hair.

31. My basement is practically Hades now that my brother spends all of his time down there.

Hades is the place for the dead or departed spirits to go; it is also the name of the ruler of the Underworld. The narrator is comparing her basement to Hell, possibly because her brother is evil and is the ruler of the basement. The reference can also mean that the basement is an undesirable place to go.

32. We had to use a special language when we talked on the phone because I couldn't trust my mom not to Watergate us.

The Watergate scandal was a major political scandal in the United States involving the administration of U.S. President Richard Nixon from 1971 to 1974 and it led to Nixon's resignation. The scandal involved Nixon hiring robbers to wiretap phones and steal documents. This reference means that the narrator is afraid her mom might be recording her phone conversations or listening in somehow.