

What are Allusions

Definition: An allusion is a figure of speech that makes a reference to a place, person, or something that happened. This can be real or imaginary and may refer to anything, including paintings, opera, folk lore, mythical figures, or religious manuscripts. The reference can be direct or may be inferred, and can broaden the reader's understanding.

There are several ways that an allusion can help a writer

Allusions engage the reader and will often help the reader remember the message or theme of the passage. Allusions allow the writer to give an example or get a point across without going into a lengthy discourse. Allusions are contingent on the reader knowing about the story or event that is referenced.

Here are some examples that allude to people or events in literature

"I was surprised his nose was not growing like Pinocchio's." This refers to the story of Pinocchio, where his nose grew whenever he told a lie. It is from *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, written by Carlo Collodi.



"When she lost her job, she acted like a Scrooge, and refused to buy anything that wasn't necessary." Scrooge was an extremely stingy character from Charles Dickens', *A Christmas Carol*.

"I thought the software would be useful, but it was a Trojan Horse." This refers to the horse that the Greeks built that contained all the soldiers. It was given as a gift to the enemy during the Trojan War and, once inside the enemy's walls, the soldiers broke out. By using trickery, the Greeks won the war.

"He was a real Romeo with the ladies." Romeo was a character in Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*, and was very romantic in expressing his love for Juliet.



Chocolate was her Achilles' heel.

"Chocolate was her Achilles' heel." This means that her weakness was her love of chocolate. Achilles is a character in Greek mythology who was invincible. His mother dipped him in magical water when he was a baby, and she held him by the heel. The magic protected him all over, except for his heel.

Biblical Allusions

There are many biblical allusions that are used in our everyday language and in writing.

Here are a few examples:

“He was a Good Samaritan yesterday when he helped the lady start her car.” This refers to the biblical story of the Good Samaritan.

“She turned the other cheek after she was cheated out of a promotion.” This comes from teaching of Jesus that you should not get revenge.

“This place is like a Garden of Eden.” The Garden of Eden was the paradise God made for Adam and Eve.

“You are a Solomon when it comes to making decisions.” This refers to King Solomon, who was very wise.

“When the volcano erupted, the nearby forest was swallowed up in dust and ash like Jonah.” Jonah was a person who was swallowed alive by a whale.

“It is raining so hard, I hope it doesn’t rain for 40 days and 40 nights.” This makes a reference to the biblical story of Noah and the ark he built. He was told by God that it would rain for 40 days and 40 nights and flood the land.



Understanding Allusions

Because allusions make reference to something other than what is directly being discussed, you may miss an allusion or fail to understand it if you do not know the underlying biblical story, literary tale or other reference point.



Fortunately, today it is easy to look these things up so when someone references something you do not understand, you can easily turn to the Internet to learn enough to grasp the allusion for yourself.