

Name: _____ Period: _____

Allusion Worksheet

An **allusion** is a reference to an historical or literary event or person. Allusions are used in all forms of literature and paintings, in newspaper headlines, advertisements, song lyrics, and political speeches. But why? There are several reasons we use allusions. The most important one is that a one or two word allusion can often take the place of a much longer explanation.

If, for example, you want to say that a woman is beautiful, has the ability to turn men into beasts, and can lure them to destruction, you will use almost twenty words. Instead you can simply say that she is a Circe. Circe, a demigoddess of ancient Greece, was beautiful and turned Odysseus' men into swine in The Odyssey. Anyone who knows the story of Circe (and many people do) knows immediately the kind of woman you are talking about when you mention a Circe.

Directions: In the following questions, there will be a sentence with an allusion in it. The allusion will be italicized. A. will explain the reference. In B., you will need to explain the meaning of the allusion being used in the sentence.

1. Vietnam was President Johnson's Achilles' heel.
 - a. When Achilles was an infant, his mother dipped him into the river Styx. This made him invulnerable to injury except on the heel, which his mother was holding. Hence, his heel was his one weak point- the one place he could be seriously injured.
 - b. Meaning of the allusion?

2. To give the graduating seniors an extended lunch period instead of the beach party they requested is indeed to throw a sop to Cerberus.
 - a. Cerberus was a vicious three-headed dog that guarded the entrance to the underworld. To distract him and to placate him, people sometimes threw him a handful of meat- just enough to keep him quiet for a bit.
 - b. Meaning of the allusion?

3. The multimillionaire wondered, with satisfaction, if he truly had the Midas touch.
 - a. Midas was a king of Phrygia. One of Bacchus' men walked away from the group and was lost; Midas returned him to Bacchus. Bacchus was so

delighted he offered Midas one wish. Without thinking, Midas asked for and received a special gift– everything he touched turned to gold.

b. Meaning of the allusion?

4. His protean personality fascinated his friends but at the same time caused them to distrust him.

a. Proteus was a sea-god who could change his shape at will.

b. Meaning of the allusion?

5. A pyrrhic victory is the only kind of victory possible in a nuclear war.

a. Pyrrhus, an ancient king, won a battle but during the battle suffered very heavy losses.

b. Meaning of the allusion?

6. The present school curriculum seems to some students a procrustean bed.

a. A legendary Greek highwayman, Procrustes, tied his victims to a iron bed and then made them the right length for it by stretching those who were too short and cutting off as much as necessary from those who were too long.

b. Meaning of the allusion?

7. Travels With Charley, John Steinbeck’s report of the people and places encountered in his cross-country trip, might well be subtitled, “An American Odyssey.”

a. Odysseus, a Greek hero, made a ten-year journey from the Troy to his home in Ithaca after the end of the Trojan War. During his journey he had many adventures and overcame many dangers, thus gaining knowledge of himself and his world.

b. Meaning of the allusion?

8. Thanks to her agent, a veritable Pygmalion, she was transformed from an ugly duckling into a Hollywood beauty.

a. Pygmalion, a woman-hater who resolved to never marry, was a sculptor who created a statue of a woman so beautiful that he fell in love with it. From his unending pain and through intercession of the gods, it was brought to life.

b. Meaning of the allusion?

9. A teenager's attempt to win peer approval and parental approval may make him feel he is steering a course between Scylla and Charybdis.

a. Scylla was a frightful monster that lived in some cliffs and Charybdis a whirlpool on opposite sides of a narrow channel. Ships steering between them had to avoid both dangers.

b. Meaning of the allusion?

10. Some poets, comically, hope to arrive at the height of Parnassus by way of a jet plane.

a. Parnassus was a mountain in Greece sacred to Apollo and the Muses. It symbolizes the font of inspiration and the arts.

b. Meaning of the allusion?

ALLUSIONS

Name _____

Each set of sentences below contains an allusion. Identify the allusion, then explain what the author wants you to understand from the allusion.

EX: "I don't know if this store carries shoes in your size, Sasquatch," my dad joked when we went shopping for another new pair of shoes, my second pair in two months.

Allusion: Sasquatch

Meaning: Legend says Sasquatch is huge; dad means the child's feet are big.

1. Doug showed off his new gold watch to his friend Rachel. "Nice watch, Jay Z!" Rachel gushed.

Allusion: _____

Meaning: _____

2. I hoped to sign the birthday card our team bought for Coach, but I couldn't find a spot to sign my name because someone went all John Hancock on it and signed his name across the whole card.

Allusion: _____

Meaning: _____

3. We were all starry-eyed as we stepped into the doctor's mansion. "I don't think Buckingham Palace is as fancy as this house!" Mom gasped under her breath.

Allusion: _____

Meaning: _____

4. He poured his heart out in the love letter to his girlfriend. The letter was as poetic as if Shakespeare himself had written it.

Allusion: _____

Meaning: _____

5. I poured myself a cup of coffee in the teacher's lounge and took a sip. It wasn't Starbucks, but the jolt of hot, steamy caffeine helped wake me up.

Allusion: _____

Meaning: _____

6. The three-year-old jumped out of the tub, leaving murky, dingy water in his wake. Staring into the tub, his dad exclaimed, "Wowsa. It's like the Boston Tea Party in there."

Allusion: _____

Meaning: _____