



# Researching Allusions

## Guide to Using the Student Resource

### ABOUT THIS LESSON

The complex texts presented in ELA classrooms that stress college- and career-readiness often include allusions that allow writers to subtly embed ideas and associations, yet students often overlook this information because they do not recognize the allusions. The Student Resource serves as an introduction to various types of allusions students may encounter in their reading or in other media.

College- and career-readiness standards emphasize that students must be able to gather, evaluate, and synthesize information effectively. Teachers must consider how best to incorporate research skills into their regular reading and writing activities—both on a small scale and in extended research projects.

This guide to the Student Resource suggests ways teachers can meet both objectives—teaching students to recognize and appreciate allusions and embedding relevant research into classroom instruction. The first two activities below introduce the importance of allusions and could be used with middle grades and/or high school students. The allusion notebook allows students to extend their knowledge of allusions and work more independently.

### TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are designed to integrate research instruction by including the study of allusions as a natural part of daily classroom activity.

**ALLUSIONS IN SONG LYRICS**

Students should:

- Research song lyrics to find a song with an allusion in it. Lyrics may be found in sheet music, on CD inserts, or on the Internet.
- Type or print the lyrics, include the title of the song and the name of the artist. Or if making a multi-media presentation, insert the lyrics into the presentation media, such as a PowerPoint®, Glogster poster, or Prezi.
- On the lyrics, highlight the allusion.
- Research the allusion. Look in reference books in the media center or on the Internet to find the source of the allusion and its literal meaning. Include this information in either the printed project or the media presentation.
- Write a paragraph that includes an explanation of the allusion, the type of allusion, the connotations, and the effect of the allusion in the song.

(One additional option for students who are presenting their project to the class is to embed the song, or an excerpt from the song that includes the allusion, into the presentation.)

**ALLUSIONS IN LITERATURE TITLES**

The following list contains titles of literary works in which the author of the work uses an allusion to another literary work. As titles of literary works usually carry significant meaning, these allusions should give some hints as to the author’s purpose without students having to read the work itself.

For this project students should:

- look up the source and literal meaning of these allusions.
- choose three of the allusions and write an explanation of what the author might have been trying to convey about the work by using the allusion in the title.

1. *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck
2. “Out, out—” by Robert Frost
3. *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck
4. *All the King’s Men* by Robert Penn Warren
5. *Blithe Spirit* by Noel Coward
6. *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley
7. *Death Be Not Proud* by John Gunther
8. *Down to a Sunless Sea* by David Graham
9. *Far from the Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy
10. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway
11. *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton
12. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
13. *I Sing the Body Electric* by Ray Bradbury
14. *No Country for Old Men* by Cormac McCarthy
15. *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry
16. *Shall Not Perish* by William Faulkner
17. *Tender is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
18. “Tiger! Tiger!” by Rudyard Kipling
19. *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray
20. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* by E.M. Forster

**ALLUSION NOTEBOOK:**

This project is available on the NMSI website (under Lessons and Overviews/Grade 10/Composition). It can be an ongoing assignment that starts at the beginning of the year and is assessed at the end of each semester. Students will need guidance, especially at first, in recognizing allusions that occur in their reading. With some assistance from their teachers, however, students soon become interested in finding and interpreting allusions in all they read, as well as in film, advertisements, and daily conversation.

# Researching Allusions

## Student Resource

**Allusion:** an implied or indirect reference to something assumed to be known, such as a historical event or person, a well-known quotation from literature, an event or person from the Bible, a famous work of art, or a reference to popular culture. An allusion is **a form of comparison** and can be used by a writer to suggest ideas by connotation. The effectiveness of any allusion depends upon the reader’s knowledge of the reference alluded to.

### Types of Allusions

**Mythological:** References to the gods, characters, and events from various mythologies: Greek, Roman, Norse, Aztec, Native American, etc. Also closely related are references to legends or folktales.

Examples: Cupid’s arrow, Trojan horse, Achilles’ heel, Pandora’s box, Midas touch

**Biblical (Religious):** References to stories, people, or scripture from the Old Testament or New Testament in the Christian Bible. Also relates to sacred texts other than the Bible, such as the Torah and the Qur’an.

Examples: the patience of Job, Antediluvian, a Judas, doubting Thomas, the Promised Land, a good Samaritan, prodigal son, kiss of death

**Historical:** References to people, places, even buildings that have a significant role in history.

Examples: a Benedict Arnold, a Socratic discussion, a Casanova, a Napoleon complex

**Literary:** References to characters, places, events, from literature. Sources can be novels, poetry, short stories, or drama.

Examples: an Oedipus complex, a Peter Pan, as stingy as Scrooge, a catch-22, nine circles, a Pollyanna, “it was the best of times; it was the worst of times”

**Popular Culture:** References to something from popular songs, movies, TV shows, video games, fads. These are things that most people have some understanding of because of their popularity. (These, unlike the other types, are not as long-lived and tend to change trend by trend.)

Examples: a Barbie, “Google it,” “may the odds be ever in your favor,” “15 minutes of fame”

**Art:** References to famous paintings, sculpture, architecture, dance, music, or photography

Examples: a Mona Lisa smile, the body of David

**Why use an allusion when an explanation will do?** Allusions:

- are more concise
- are more poetic
- are a traditional means of communication (like metaphor and symbol)
- add layers of meaning
- establish an emotional connection
- establish ethos