

## Grade 7 Playlist: Interpreting Allusions in Context

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.5.A*:

- Interpret figures of speech (e.g., literary, biblical, and mythological allusions) in context.

### Welcome

When reading old or modern texts, readers often come across familiar references. For example, a greedy person might be called a “Scrooge.” Someone who is good at solving mysteries may be referred to as a “regular Sherlock Holmes.” If a mistake is made that leads to not just one problem but a chain of negative events, someone may say, “Pandora’s box has been opened!” Readers may know that Scrooge, Sherlock Holmes, and Pandora are characters from works of literature and mythology. Knowledge of the references’ sources adds meaning to the text. However, even without recognizing the reference, readers could interpret the expressions’ meaning by examining the context.

### Watch!

Watch this video for a brief overview of these expressions:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/literary-device-allusion-youtube/99757>

### Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- interpret literary allusions in context.

### Review

#### Key Terms

- An **allusion** is an expression that makes a reference to a previous work without mentioning it specifically. Allusions can reference people, places, things, or ideas that are culturally, politically, or historically significant.
- The **context** identifies the words, phrases, and ideas that surround the allusion.

### Exploring the Standard

Allusions from literary, biblical, and mythological sources are often used in literature. Some readers can immediately identify the allusions based on their prior knowledge. Not all allusions are familiar, however. When the allusions are unfamiliar, a reader can interpret their meanings by analyzing allusions in context, even without fully understanding the stories behind them.



**Watch!**

Watch this video to learn more about allusions in literature:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJ9vHo-HCVY>

**A Closer Look: Why Use Allusions?**

An author might want to use allusions to other works of literature in their writing for many reasons. One reason is that allusions can give a literary work deeper meaning. Read the following example.

**Example 1**

Tommy and Sarah were the Romeo and Juliet of Applesed Drive.

This sentence contains an allusion to the characters Romeo and Juliet from Shakespeare's well-known play *Romeo and Juliet*. Because Tommy and Sarah are compared to the characters in Shakespeare's drama, readers would know immediately that Sarah and Tommy's story would parallel the story of Romeo and Juliet—that is, Sarah and Tommy may like each other and want to date, but their parents likely do not get along. This allusion adds deeper meaning to the sentence and to the story of Tommy and Sarah.

Another reason why an author might use an allusion is to add meaning with a minimal number of words. Read the following examples. One contains an allusion, and one does not.

**Example 2**

Cleaning the garage was a Herculean task.

Cleaning the garage seemed nearly impossible, and I was certain it would take all day, if it could be finished at all.

The first sentence contains an allusion to Hercules, a hero from Greek mythology known for his great strength and intelligence. In one of the myths involving Hercules, the great hero was ordered to perform a series of extremely difficult tasks, called the Twelve Labors of Hercules. One labor included slaying a lion that could not be killed with human weapons; another involved kidnapping a three-headed dog called Cerberus. Hercules completed each of these tasks without fail, using both his intelligence and his strength. By comparing cleaning the garage to a Herculean task, the author can quickly communicate the difficulty of the task without using too many words. The second sentence has a similar meaning but relies on more words to express the same idea.

