Teaching Notes: Interpreting Allusions in Context

The goal of L.7.5.A is for students to learn how to interpret figures of speech in context. The playlist focuses on one figure of speech—the allusion—with an emphasis on literary, biblical, and mythological references. The following presents further instruction on what to do when allusions are less obvious than the well-known examples in the playlist. Additional resources to read and integrate into instruction as appropriate are also included.

Further Instruction: When Allusions Are Less Obvious

Although context can often be used to determine the meanings of allusions, sometimes it is nearly impossible to understand a literary work without researching its allusions. Provide students with the lines of poetry in Example 1, from the last stanza of "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe:

- http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17192/17192-h/17192-h.htm

Example 1

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
    And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
    And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
    Shall be lifted—nevermore!

Ask students to identify and research the mythological allusion in the second line: "the pallid bust of Pallas." Students may be unfamiliar with Pallas, which is another name for Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. Students can gather information about Pallas and Athena, then share the significance of the allusion: The raven sits upon a bust of this goddess, suggesting the presence of wisdom.

Additional Resources

"Allusion": This web page provides brief instruction on allusions and gives examples in common conversation as well as literature.

- http://literarydevices.net/allusion/

"It's All an Allusion: Identifying Allusions, in Literature and in Life": This blog from the *New York Times*' Learning Network blog provides a detailed lesson on allusions, plus related reading, activities, and a quiz.

- http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/09/its-all-an-allusion-identifying-allusions-in-literature-and-in-life/?_r=0

"Just Like Brian Wilson Did: Using Allusion to Teach Imagery & Theme": This lesson uses two songs in a lesson designed to teach students about allusions, imagery, and theme.

- http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/3948?ref=search

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Self-Check: L.7.5.A

1. Read this stanza from the poem "At the Window" by poet D.H. Lawrence:

   "The pine-trees bend to listen to the autumn wind as it mutters
   Something which sets the black poplars [shaking] with hysterical laughter;
   While slowly the house of day is closing its eastern shutters."

   In which of the following ways does the poet use figurative language in the stanza?

   A. He uses simile to compare the trees to something else.
   B. He uses allusion to compare the trees to a famous painting.
   C. He uses hyperbole to make the trees seem more important.
   D. He uses personification to describe the trees' actions.

Item ID	ELA_G7_MCQ_WN02699
DOK level	1
Answer Choice Rationale 1	A simile is a figure of speech that compares two objects or ideas using "like" or "as." The poet does not use this type of figurative language.
Answer Choice Rationale 2	An allusion is a figure of speech in which a writer refers to another work of art. The poet does not use this type of figurative language.
Answer Choice Rationale 3	A hyperbole is an exaggeration or overstatement of something. The poet does not use this type of figurative language.
Answer Choice Rationale 4	Key. Personification is giving human traits to objects, such as trees bending to listen or laughing and wind muttering.

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2. Read the following sentence:

He lied so much that by the end of the day his nose looked like Pinocchio's.

Which of the following is the literary allusion made in this sentence?

A. Pinocchio's nose grew whenever he told a lie.
B. Pinocchio was a character who lied all the time.
C. Pinocchio's lies grew larger and larger over time.
D. Pinocchio was a character who had a very large nose.

Item ID	ELA_G7_MCQ_WN02715
DOK level	2
Answer Choice Rationale 1	Key. Pinocchio's nose grew whenever he told a lie in the book *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. It is used as an allusion whenever someone is obviously telling lies because, like with Pinocchio's nose, it is easy to tell.
Answer Choice Rationale 2	Pinocchio only lied some of the time.
Answer Choice Rationale 3	Pinocchio's lies were not the thing that grew the most over time.
Answer Choice Rationale 4	Pinocchio only had a large nose some of the time.

3. Read the following sentence:

Making sure that everyone was awake, dressed, fed, and out the door on time for school was a herculean effort each morning.

Which of the following is the mythological allusion made in this sentence?

A. Hercules mainly worked in the mornings.
B. Hercules was strong and put in a lot of effort.
C. Hercules organized and cared for many children.
D. Hercules mainly tended to the household chores.

Item ID	ELA_G7_MCQ_WN02716
DOK level	2
Answer Choice Rationale 1	Hercules worked all through the day.
Answer Choice Rationale 2	Key. Hercules was a mythological hero with superhuman strength who performed 12 incredibly difficult labors. People may refer to Hercules whenever something is really hard and takes a lot of effort.
Answer Choice Rationale 3	Hercules was a mythological hero and did not take care of children.
Answer Choice Rationale 4	Hercules was a mythological hero and did not take care of a household.

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4. Read the sentence.

She was like Jekyll and Hyde; one minute she was sweet as could be, and the next minute she was critical of everything you were doing.

Which statements **best** describe the sentence? Select the **two** correct answers.

A. The sentence contains a literary allusion.
B. The sentence contains a biblical allusion.
C. The sentence contains a mythological allusion.
D. The sentence refers to a character who had a split personality with good and evil sides.
E. The sentence refers to two different Greek gods.

Item ID	ELA_L.7.5.A_MCQ_Q226
DOK level	2
Key/correct answer	A, D; Option A contains a literary allusion and option D refers to a character who had a split personality with good and evil sides.

5. Read the sentence.

He's a great basketball player, but shooting free throws continues to be his Achilles heel.

Which statements **best** explain the underlined words? Select the **two** correct answers.

A. Achilles was a character in Greek mythology.
B. Achilles was a biblical figure.
C. An Achilles heel is an area of vulnerability.
D. An Achilles heel is an area of strength.
E. An Achilles heel is a body part used specifically in athletic activities.

Item ID	ELA_L.7.5.A_MCQ_Q227
DOK level	2
Key/correct answer	A, C; The phrase "Achilles heel" is a mythological allusion. It refers to the character Achilles, who was strong except for one vulnerable spot on his heel.

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