

5.7 The function of an allusion

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 13 marks

Objective

Build the skills to explain an **allusion** 典故.

You must be able to:

- name the three categories of thing an allusion can reference
- explain what an allusion asks of a reader
- explain what happens when a reader misses one
- analyse an allusion by what it imports

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Three categories

Allusions in a text can reference literary works including myths and sacred texts; other works of art including paintings and music; or people, places, or events outside the text.

■ What it asks

An allusion asks the reader to bring something in from outside. The poem gets, in a word or two, everything the referenced thing carries.

■ Missing one

A missed allusion does not stop the line making sense—it makes it make *less*. That is why identifying one and looking it up is real analytical work rather than trivia.

■ What it imports

Ask what the referenced thing is known for, and which part of that the poem wants. An allusion to a famous betrayal imports the betrayal, not the whole story.

2 Practice

2.1 Name the three categories an allusion can reference.

[3]

2.2 Explain what an allusion asks of a reader. [2]

2.3 A missed allusion has a cost.

(a) State it. [1]

(b) State the question to ask when analysing one. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Allusions may reference literary works, other works of art, and [1]

- **A** people, places or events outside the text
 - **B** page numbers
 - **C** the reader's name
 - **D** nothing further
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3.2 A missed allusion makes a line [1]

- **A** meaningless
 - **B** mean less
 - **C** longer
 - **D** unreadable
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3.3 A poem calls a garden "an Eden".

(a) State what is imported. [1]

(b) Explain which part of the reference the poem is likely to want. [2]

4 Go further

- work through the **5.7 The function of an allusion** lesson on the **Learn** page;
- read the **Poetry II** section of the AP English Literature handout on the **Know** page.

Solutions

2.1 literary works including myths and sacred texts; other works of art including paintings and music; people, places or events outside the text.

2.2 to bring in what the referenced thing carries, so the poem gains it in a word or two.

2.3 (a) the line makes less, though it still makes sense. (b) what the referenced thing is known for and which part of that the poem wants.

3.1 A. the CED's third category.

3.2 B. it means less.

3.3 (a) the associations of a first, perfect garden. (b) probably the loss rather than the perfection, since Eden is best known for being forfeited.