

## Chapters 1 – 3

### **Standards Focus: Allusions**

An **allusion** is an implied or indirect reference to a person, event, or another text. Allusions are included in literature with the assumption that the reader and the author share a common knowledge, and therefore the reader will understand the reference. Most allusions in Western literature come from the Bible, mythology, or other Western literature.

Allusions conjure images of various characters or events that are linked to a specific idea and can be used to tie together a past issue with a current one. An allusion can be anything from the mention of a name to a line of a song, as an author uses the reference to make his point clearer. However, if the reader does not know the allusion to which the author is referring, the effect of the allusion is lost and the point of the reference may be missed.

Allusions are used not only in literature, but also in films, speeches, poetry, and even common, everyday dialogue. For example, maybe you know a person who is stingy and grumpy when Christmas time rolls around. You might say something to them like, “Oh, John, don’t be such a Scrooge.” Maybe you have said this before and not even realized you were giving an allusion to a character from Charles Dickens’s novel, *A Christmas Carol*.

**Directions:** Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper using complete sentences.

1. Read the list of allusions from *The Scarlet Letter* (pages 17-21). Have you heard of any of these allusions? Are there some references with which you are more familiar than others? Take a look specifically at the allusions found in Chapters 1-3. Choose three allusions, and then explain the reference and how it is appropriate at that point in the novel. Why do you think Hawthorne included each of these in his novel?
2. What is important about the allusion Hawthorne makes about Mistress Hibbins?
3. Have you heard any of the allusions made in or about *The Scarlet Letter* in any other contexts, such as in another book, speech, or part of history? Where and in what context? Make a prediction about how these allusions may affect *The Scarlet Letter*.
4. Name some other allusions that you have heard or read about in literature. What was their context and significance? Why was an allusion appropriate at that particular moment? If necessary, thumb through a novel or two you have already read.
5. Why are allusions sometimes more effective than simply explaining a situation more thoroughly? What are the pros and cons of using allusions?