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Free Lesson of the Month June, 2010

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This month’s Free Lesson comes from the [To Kill a Mockingbird Activity Pack](#) and includes three pre-reading activities to get your students ready to read the novel!

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Pre-Reading

Identifying Allusions

Objective: Identifying allusions and recognizing the function they can serve

Activity I

While Harper Lee's allusion to Roosevelt's speech lets us set the time of the story, allusions also perform other functions. Frequently, they are used as metaphors simply to make a more dramatic or important statement, while at other times they can be used as a concise way to convey information. Some allusions you may recognize and quickly get the point. For example: "More than one friend referred to him as Lincolnesque." Immediately, you know the reference is to Abraham Lincoln and, in context, you get the image of a tall, gaunt man.

If you do not know the object/person/place alluded to, however, you missed the point the author was making. For example: "At the last moment, he changed his mind, and the captain would never know of the auto-da-fé that had been prepared for him." Additional context may or may not allow you to figure out the meaning of "auto-da-fé," but if it does not, you would need to check a dictionary, encyclopedia or the Internet, which would tell you something similar to the following:

auto-da-fé—During the Spanish Inquisition, this was the term that referred to the official ceremony of pronouncing judgment upon a heretic and executing him or her. Today, it is used to refer to metaphorical executions, as in personal or business relationships.

By knowing and understanding the allusion in the example about the captain, you would immediately realize that his career or life was in danger.

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Pre-Reading

Identifying Allusions (cont.)

Objective: Identifying allusions and recognizing the function they can serve

Activity II

For the following, identify the person, object, or event referred to and the point the allusion is making. If you are unsure of the reference, check a dictionary or other reference work.

1. "Was Baxter a benefactor betrayed by his charges or a Fagin? That was the first questions the juvenile authorities had to answer."

Fagin is a character from Charles Dickens's novel, Oliver Twist. In the novel, Fagin trains children to be pickpockets. The allusion refers to a person who uses children for his or her own evil purposes.

2. The National Organization of Women has been quoted as saying that The Promise Keepers is a Trojan horse for ultra-conservative anti-feminists.

The Trojan horse was a huge, hollow wooden horse filled with Greek soldiers that was left at the gates of Troy as a gift. It was brought into the city, the soldiers came out at night, and they opened the gates to the Greek army, which destroyed Troy.

3. A New York City reporter said that Madonna is "the ultimate Frankenstein product of MTV."

Victor Frankenstein is a character in the novel Frankenstein by Mary Shelley. He is a young medical student, who creates a monster that destroys him. The allusion refers to something created that becomes a danger to its creator.

4. When Disneyland, Paris, opened in April, 1992, a magazine reported that French sociologists complained that it would be an "intellectual Chernobyl."

"Chernobyl" refers to the disaster at a nuclear power plant located in the town of Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union. The allusion means that intellectual life in France will be destroyed by Disneyland.

5. For years, groups that took on the tobacco industry in the courts could do little more than tilt at windmills. Now, however, there seems to be detectable change in the air.

Tilting at windmills refers to the satire Don Quixote by Cervantes. The hero of the story unrealistically tries to rescue the oppressed and fight evil. In one scene, he battles a windmill, thinking it is a dragon. The allusion refers the futility of trying to fight a much more powerful foe.

6. "If the CEO has an Achilles heel, no one in the organization had yet been able to find it."

In Greek mythology, Achilles could not be wounded anywhere, except for his heel. He is killed in battle when an arrow strikes him in his heel. The allusion refers to the CEO's hidden weakness which, if found, would result in his or her defeat.

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Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Identifying Allusions (cont.)****Objective:** Identifying allusions and recognizing the function they can serve**Activity II**

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Pre-Reading

Socio-Historical Forces

Objectives: Understanding the socio-historical forces that are relevant to this story's setting
Drawing generalizations based on specific details

Activity

Draw generalizations about the following topics. Use knowledge you have from history class, encyclopedias, the Internet, or other sources:

- The Ku Klux Klan of the 1930s
- Jim Crow laws
- Race relations in the Southern United States in the 1930s

Ku Klux Klan: Established during the Reconstruction period after the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan was a secret group working to reestablish the power of the prewar plantation owners. In 1915, the KKK gained new popularity with the goal of establishing white Protestant supremacy. In the 1930s, the KKK became active once again. After a federal lawsuit for tax evasion in 1944, the KKK went bankrupt. It experienced a brief revival during the 1960s to combat the Civil Rights Act of 1964. By the year 2000, KKK membership had dwindled to fewer than 8,000 members.

Jim Crow laws: These laws, passed in the Southern states, provided for the separation of black and white people in public places, including schools, trains, streetcars, public lavatories, and theaters. The laws attempted to create two separate societies, one black and one white.

Race relations in the 1930s: During the 1930s, when the country was faced with high unemployment, black families faced special problems. Many companies laid off black workers first, blacks often received less public assistance than whites did, and some charitable organizations excluded blacks from receiving any benefits. At this time in history, most public facilities, including the churches, were segregated. Black children and white children attended different schools, and the white schools generally had better teachers and facilities than the black ones. The culture at the time discouraged social contact between blacks and whites of opposite sexes. In addition, a white person's word was almost always taken over the word of a black person, particularly in the South. Most whites treated blacks with an air of superiority, even in the North. Black society, however, was neither ready nor able to do much more than complain about its treatment. That situation would not change much until after World War II, when returning black soldiers wanted equality and began to demand it, both legally and morally.

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