

Allusion

- ❑ What is an allusion? Many poets throughout history have used allusions to add depth and richness to their works. Can you give some examples of this poetic device from the poems that you read this week?
 - ❑ *An allusion is a reference within a literary work to something outside of the work, most often a historical or literary figure.*
 - ❑ *Examples:*
 - ❑ *“To Helen”*: This poem is addressed to Helen of Troy (a figure in Greek and Roman literature), which could be considered an allusion.¹ “Nicean barks,” “Naiad,” “Greece,” “Rome,” “Psyche,” and “Holy-land” are allusions within the poem to things, characters, and places from literature and history (l. 2, 8-9, 10, 14, 15).
 - ❑ *“The Wreck of the Hesperus”* alludes to the historical event of Christ calming the Sea of Galilee (l. 55-56).
- ❑ How do you think these allusions serve to enrich the two poems in which they appear?

Answers will vary, but here are some points you may wish to make after hearing your student’s thoughts:

 - ❑ *“To Helen”*: The allusions in this poem are to minor Greco-Roman goddesses (naiads and Psyche), with direct references also to Greece, Rome, and the ancient “Holy-land” (probably meaning Judea). “Nicean barks” are also a reference to Nyca, an island paradise in classical literature that is surrounded by perfumed seas. These allusions enhance the speaker’s praise of Helen with references to people and places from her time.
 - ❑ *“The Wreck of the Hesperus”*: This allusion to Christ’s calming of the sea adds a note of poignancy to the maiden’s prayer to be saved from the storm that is blowing against her own ship.

Personification

- ❑ What is personification? Can you give some examples of it from the poems that you read this week?
 - ❑ *Personification is a figure of speech in which human attributes are given to something nonhuman, such as animals, objects, or abstract qualities (Leland Ryken, Words of Delight 516).*
 - ❑ *Examples:*
 - ❑ *“The Bells”*: The alarm bells are personified as “too much horrified to speak / they can only shriek” (l. 41-42).
 - ❑ *“Paul Revere’s Ride”*: The windows to the meeting house are personified as looking at Paul Revere “with a spectral glare / As if they already stood aghast / at the bloody work they would look upon” (l. 87-90).
 - ❑ *“Sonnet—to Science”*: Science is personified as the “true daughter of Old Time” (l. 1-3).
- ❑ What can personification do for a poem, in your opinion? Why do you think a poet would choose to use it?
 - ❑ *Answers will vary, but you might point out to your student that personification entertains the imagination by asking it to consider objects, animals, etc., as personalities. This can give a fresh interest to such objects as alarm bells and windows, by making them “horrified” and “aghast.”*
 - ❑ *Personification also sometimes provides the speaker in a poem with a friend or an enemy to whom he can relate. In “Sonnet—to Science,” Poe’s personification of science sharpens the force of his complaint because he seems to be accusing a personal enemy rather than an abstract process.*

Apostrophe

- ❑ Apostrophe is a figure of speech in which the writer or speaker “addresses someone absent or something non-human as if it were present or human and could respond to the address” (Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight* 513). The device has a long poetic pedigree that stretches back beyond the Psalms and down through the Roman-tics.² Can you give an example of apostrophe in Poe’s “Sonnet—to Science”?

In this poem, Poe asks accusative questions of science as if it were a conscious being who could answer him (l. 5-14).
- ❑ What effect does this apostrophe have on you as a reader? Why do you think Poe chose to use this device here?

Answers will vary, but you might point out to the student that it can give an urgency and even drama to poetry, because direct address heightens immediacy and the address of something or someone who cannot answer is particularly poignant and dramatic.
- ❑ Do you think that Poe is using apostrophe when he has his speaker address a raven in “The Raven”?

Answers will vary. We think that arguably this is an example of apostrophe because the bird is not human or intelligent, but the speaker in the poem treats it as if it were. On the other hand, one could argue that it is not apostrophe because the bird is present and can in fact reply, even if it is not human.

1 Strictly speaking, since Helen is the subject of the whole poem, she is not a brief artistic reference within the poem (which is how allusion usually works). However, if your student wrote down that Helen is an allusion, we think you can accept that answer as being consistent with the basic principle of this poetic device, which is one of referring back to figures of literature and history.

2 For instance, Robert Burns used apostrophe when he addressed the mouse in the poem “To A Mouse,” which your student read in Week 5.

2. From your student's readings in the Literary Introduction, the Author Index (Appendix A) of *Poetics*, and the *Shorter Works Anthology*, discuss Longfellow and his poetry. (Student Questions #1 and 3)
- ❑ Show your scansion exercise on Longfellow's poem "A Psalm of Life." What are this poem's meter, stanza form, and rhyme scheme? Is it a regular poem (i.e., one in which the meter is consistent)?
The meter is trochaic. The first and third lines contain four complete trochaic feet; the second and third have three and a half trochaic feet. The stanzas are all quatrains (four-line stanzas), and the rhyme scheme is abab. The poem is regular, with few (if any) variations from the established pattern.
 - ❑ Does Longfellow have characteristic content and forms? In other words, are there certain subjects, themes, genres, meters, stanza forms, rhyme schemes, techniques, and devices (such as imagery, or alliteration, or any of the other devices you considered this week), that he tends to use?
 - ❑ *Longfellow wrote plays, poems, and stories, including ballads, lyrics, and even an epic poem. His subjects and themes ranged from slavery and abolitionism to patriotism and American history, to mythology and finally themes of celebration and worship centered on Christ and Christian history.*
 - ❑ *Also in the poetic tradition of the ages, Longfellow depended on imagery for much of the power of his verse.¹*
 - ❑ *Like most authors in the English and American poetic tradition up to his time, Longfellow relied heavily on the iambic foot (i.e. many of his poetic lines have a dominant pattern of light-heavy-light-heavy stresses), though in several poems he also mixes it freely with anapests (two light stresses followed by a heavy one).²*
 - ❑ At the same time, however, Longfellow was willing to experiment with his meters. For instance, "A Psalm of Life" and *The Song of Hiawatha* have a strong trochaic cadence: **dum**—dum—**dum**—dum, etc.
 - ❑ Did you find anything in the content and form of Longfellow's poetry that reflects Romanticism?
These poems that we read from Longfellow do not savor strongly of Romanticism. However, in general, Longfellow's works do reflect the sentimentalism (e.g., "The Wreck of the Hesperus") and sense of striving (e.g., "A Psalm of Life") that characterized Romantic literature. He also used forms popularized by the Romantics, such as the ballad.
 - ❑ Longfellow wrote the poem "A Psalm of Life" in 1838, in response to the death of his first wife, Mary. Although he loved Mary deeply and experienced intense grief, Longfellow was not thrown into paralyzing depression, no doubt at least partly because of the beliefs he relates in "A Psalm of Life." What theme does he express in this poem? Do you think it is biblical? Why or why not?
Essentially, Longfellow is exhorting a grieving soul not to be caught up and surrendered to the emotions of despair "like dumb, driven cattle" (l. 19), but "still achieving, still pursuing" (l. 35) to "be a hero in the strife" (l. 20).
- NOTE: Answers will vary on whether this theme is biblical, but here are some points you may wish to make:
- ❑ In "A Psalm of Life," Longfellow implies a biblical attitude ("and God o'erhead"), but also lays emphasis on a picture of human endurance and fortitude that does not explicitly portray the part that grace plays in Christian perseverance.
 - ❑ For instance, there is no mention of some of the ultimate purposes for suffering: God's glory, growth in our relationship with Him, and growth in perseverance and hope (Romans 5:1-5).
 - ❑ Still, we think that the theme of this poem is true, and certainly it is beautifully expressed.
3. Discuss some poetic devices that appear frequently in Edgar Allen Poe's work. (Student Questions #1 and 3)
- ❑ Does Poe have characteristic content and forms? In other words, are there certain subjects, themes, genres, meters, stanza forms, rhyme schemes, techniques, and devices (such as imagery, alliteration, etc.), that he tends to use? Does his work strongly reflect Romanticism?
 - ❑ *Poe is rather unique in the extent to which he focused on and experiments with sounds. Imagery is present in his poetry, but he is at least as likely to use sound patterns as he is to use visual word-pictures and symbols to convey a particular mood or idea.*
 - ❑ *Poe expressed distaste for Romanticism, but his works still have much of its flavor, savoring especially of the lurid, excessive, unnatural, grotesquely supernatural, sinister, frightful, and passionate—in a word, the Gothic—elements of Romanticism.*

¹ See the section on imagery in topic 1 for examples of imagery from Longfellow's "The Slave's Dream," "The Village Blacksmith," "Paul Revere's Ride," "The Wreck of the Hesperus," and "A Psalm of Life." Consider also the famous image of a person's good example in life being like "footprints in the sands of time" that point the way to others (from "A Psalm of Life," l. 28).

² Some examples are "A Psalm of Life," "The Wreck of the Hesperus," and "The Village Blacksmith."