

Name _____

ALLUSION

GET READY:

What do you think it would mean if someone called you "a regular da Vinci" or "a real Dracula"?

READ THIS:

Jake, an American, and his Italian friend Serena are opening their paychecks.

Serena: Wow! Another bonus! I think our boss is really generous, don't you?

Jake: Yeah. You know what they say about a fool and his money.

Serena: What?

Jake: You know, "A fool and his money are soon parted." It's a proverb.

Serena: Oh. I see. So you think our boss is a fool?

Jake: Nah, he's OK. At least he's not like my last boss. That guy was a regular Scrooge.

Serena: Who?

Jake: Ebenezer Scrooge. He was a mean boss in a story by Charles Dickens.

Serena: Oh, I get it. But why do you keep talking in riddles?

Jake: Ha! They might seem like riddles, Serena, but they're just allusions. They're a really common way of talking, a kind of "cultural shorthand." I think you do it in your language, too.

Serena: Oh, yes, all the time. But that's easy for me, because I know my culture.

Jake: Yeah, I guess the only way to deal with the problem is to gain more cultural knowledge. Anyway, enjoy your bonus.

Serena: Yes, I will not look it in the mouth.

Jake: Nice try!

NOTES:

Jake's right: Allusions are a kind of "cultural shorthand," and they're commonly found.

An allusion might include using just part of a common saying, as Jake does when he states only half of the proverb "A fool and his money are soon parted." (Serena tries this--without much success--in referring to the expression "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.")

Another type of allusion is a brief mention of people or events from literature or history, as when Jake mentioned "Scrooge."

There are two steps to appreciating an allusion.

Step one is to recognize that there IS an allusion. If something that you are reading mentions a name or a place that you're not familiar with, it may be enough to simply look it up. "His grandfather was Napoleon." That's no allusion; it's a direct reference.

But this is different: "My grandfather was a little Napoleon around the house." That's an allusion. It's the

"tip of the iceberg": to understand what's being said, you have to know that Napoleon was famous for being aggressive and pushy.

And that's the second step in understanding allusions: After you know they are THERE, you have to know what they MEAN. And a dictionary will seldom tell you this. Napoleon's famous aggressive attitude is something you would have to know from general cultural knowledge.

How can you build up such knowledge? Read as much as you can. Watch films. Immerse yourself in culture. It may take years, but at last, you will catch most of the allusions that come your way. In time, people will think you are a regular Socrates!

PRACTICE:

"He's a regular _____." What name can you use for people with these characteristics?

1. a great writer
2. a rich person
3. a smart person
4. a great dancer
5. a person who's too strong, like a pushy boss or teacher

- a. Einstein
- b. Hitler
- c. Michael Jackson
- d. Shakespeare
- e. Bill Gates

Now, match the first half of a proverb to its meaning:

6. If you can't stand the heat...
7. It takes a thief...
8. Many hands...
9. If at first you don't succeed...
10. The love of money...

- f. "The best things in life are free."
- g. Someone who is familiar with the problem is the best one to fix it.
- h. If you get a lot of people working on a job, it will be easier for everyone.
- i. Don't keep trying to do something you are unable to do.
- j. Keep trying until you finish something.