

Analyzing Analogies and Allusions

CCLS

RL.8.4: . . . analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies and allusions to other texts.

Theme: *Arts Alive*

What **tone**, or attitude toward the subject, does the description below express? Does the writer seem amused, angry about, or full of admiration for the potter's abilities?

Julian leans over his potter's wheel, the clay spinning before him like a tiny dancer. He cups it gently with his hands, and the dancer stretches toward the ceiling, becoming a slender column. Now he places delicate fingers on the rim, and the top widens gracefully as it continues its elegant ballet.

The writer purposefully chose words to help you visualize the changing clay and recognize the beauty of sculpting. This extended comparison between two unlike things is called an **analogy**. Writers use both analogies and **allusions**—references to well-known stories, artworks, people, and so on—to enrich the meaning and shape the tone of their writing.

Study the cartoon below. How do the allusions affect its tone and meaning?



Underline the two allusions in the cartoon. Then read the chart below.

Allusion	Impact on Meaning
Mona Lisa	The reference to Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, the <i>Mona Lisa</i> , shows that the artist thinks she has created a great portrait of a beautiful woman.
Bride of Frankenstein	The reference to the Bride of Frankenstein, the fictional wife of Frankenstein's monster, shows that the model thinks the portrait is horrible.

The contrast between the allusions creates a humorous tone: The artist believes she has painted a fantastic portrait, but the model thinks she looks horrible. Writers choose words carefully to convey specific ideas and emotions. By recognizing and understanding analogies and allusions, you can better determine an author's intended tone and meaning.



Read the first two paragraphs of a story about an artist creating a painting.

Genre: Realistic Fiction

An Artist at Work by Marla Kim

Kang hesitates for a minute, as if preparing himself, and then slowly places the tip of his paintbrush on a piece of handmade paper clipped to an easel. Starting in the upper left corner, the brush swoops like a swallow, flitting first down and to the right, and then turning swiftly to glide left along the bottom of the paper. Streaks of grass-green paint remain wherever the brush has touched paper.

Kang lifts the brush, and his assistant takes it from him and hands him another, this one loaded with a chocolate-brown color. Again the swallow swoops, this time from the right side of the paper, down and to the left, then up again, forming a graceful curve. The visitors make sounds of appreciation as an image of a tree begins to take shape. “The best works of Picasso and Pollock¹ hardly compare,” they murmur. “Can’t you feel the tree branches bending in the breeze?”

¹ **Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock:** two famous 20th century painters

(continued)

Explore how to answer this question: “How does the use of analogy and allusion impact the meaning and tone of the story?”

The author develops an analogy in paragraphs 1 and 2 that gives you a vivid description of the artist’s brushstrokes. She also alludes to two important painters in paragraph 2.

Find the words the author uses for her analogy and allusion. Add them to the chart. Then complete the chart by telling how word choice affects the story’s meaning and tone.

Word Choice	Impact on Meaning	Impact on Tone
Analogy:	creates an image of the brush moving like a bird in flight, quickly and gracefully	
Allusion:		sets an admiring, respectful tone

With a partner, discuss how the meaning and tone of the story would be different without the analogy or allusion.



Close Reading

The author introduces a new analogy on this page. **Underline** two instances where the author uses the new analogy.

Hint

How are a swallow and a tiger different? What words does the author use to describe the brush movements?

Continue reading the story. Use the Close Reading and the Hint to help you answer the question.

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Kang gestures, and his assistant gives him a brush dripping with grass-green paint again. The swallow is now a tiger as the brush fiercely swipes at the bottom of the paper in short, quick strokes. The artist gestures for blue, and the tiger swipes once more. Kang stands back and surveys his creation for a minute before giving the paintbrush to his assistant, indicating that the painting is finished. “Truly amazing,” the visitors exclaim, clapping enthusiastically.

The assistant removes the paper from the easel and announces, “See me to purchase this amazing elephant painting!” For Kang is one of the painting elephants of Thailand, astonishing his visitors every day at the conservation center where he lives.

Circle the correct answer.

What is the purpose of the author’s use of the analogy on this page?

- A** It describes a change in the artist’s blending of colors and shapes.
- B** It describes a change in the artist’s perspective as he paints.
- C** It describes a change to a lighter, more delicate brushstroke.
- D** It describes a change to a stronger, more powerful painting style.



Show Your Thinking

Explain how the analogy between the brushstrokes and a tiger impacts your understanding of the author’s meaning.



Discuss with a partner how the two analogies affected the tone of the story.



Read the poem, which contains both allusions and analogies. Use the Study Buddy and the Close Reading to guide your reading.

Genre: Free Verse



In the first few lines, the speaker compares oceans to both labyrinths and poems. How will these analogies shape the poem's meaning? I'll read the poem several times to be sure I understand what he is saying.

Close Reading

What allusions does the speaker make? At what point in the poem does each one become clear? **Underline** clues that help you understand which mythical stories are named. Use the footnotes for guidance.

How does the speaker feel about poetry? Does he find it puzzling, calming, or dangerous? **Draw a box** around clues that help you identify the tone of the poem.

“Any fool can get into an ocean . . .”

by Jack Spicer, my vocabulary did this to me

- 1 Any fool can get into an ocean
But it takes a Goddess
To get out of one.
What's true of oceans is true, of course,
5 Of labyrinths and poems. When you start swimming
Through riptide of rhythms and the metaphor's seaweed
You need to be a good swimmer or a born Goddess¹
To get back out of them
Look at the sea otters bobbing wildly
10 Out in the middle of the poem
They look so eager and peaceful playing out there where the
water hardly moves
You might get out through all the waves and rocks
Into the middle of the poem to touch them
But when you've tried the blessed water long
15 Enough to want to start backward
That's when the fun starts
Unless you're a poet or an otter or something supernatural
You'll drown, dear. You'll drown
Any Greek can get you into a labyrinth
20 But it takes a hero to get out of one²
What's true of labyrinths is true of course
Of love and memory. When you start remembering.

¹ . . . a **born Goddess**: a reference to Aphrodite, a mythological Greek goddess who was said to have been born out of the sea fully grown

² **labyrinth**: a complex maze. In the Greek myth, the hero Theseus finds his way into and out of the labyrinth at Crete, rescues the youths offered as sacrifices, and slays a fearful monster, the Minotaur.



Hints

Look at all the ways the speaker compares an ocean to a poem. How are they said to be similar?

Reread the footnote about the hero Theseus. What is the connection between this myth and the references to the labyrinth in the poem?

Think about how the comparisons in the poem shape its meaning and help you understand the speaker's feelings about poetry.

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

- 1 Based on the speaker's analogy, how are oceans and poems said to be alike?
 - A Both are easy to get into, but their effect is difficult to escape.
 - B Both are dangerous, captivating, and playful all at the same time.
 - C Both are filled with monsters you must fight to gain your freedom.
 - D Both pose many obstacles before you can even reach them.
- 2 What is the purpose of the speaker's allusion to the labyrinth?
 - A to compare the abilities of a powerful Greek goddess to the heroic deeds of Theseus
 - B to suggest that readers can trap themselves inside the many layers of meaning suggested by figurative language
 - C to highlight the puzzling yet stirring message at the heart of the poem
 - D to emphasize that readers can lose themselves in a good poem, just as they would in a maze
- 3 Explain how the speaker's use of analogy and allusion have an impact on the tone of the poem. Use at least two details from the poem in your response.



Read this fictional description of a trip to watch a famous 20th-century artist at work. Then answer the questions that follow.

A Trip over the Rainbow

by Michael Valdez

1 The sun woke Ben the morning of July 20, 1951, and he was so excited he couldn't get back to sleep. It was the day his summer art class was going to visit the famous artist Jackson Pollock. Not many people were allowed to see the artist's studio at his farmhouse in Springs on New York's Long Island, but Miss Zanders, Ben's teacher, had been a student with the famous artist in the Art Students' League twenty years ago. As a result, her class had gotten special permission for the visit.

2 Ben had discovered art during the last school year, and he was especially inspired by abstract painting. He was fascinated by how modern artists put colors and shapes together to create a feeling or an impression without actually showing a real-life image. It seemed almost mystical, like turning straw into gold, and Mr. Pollock was a master. The chance to see this kind of art being created was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Ben had read about Mr. Pollock's unique style; now he was about to witness it firsthand.

3 As the class arrived at Mr. Pollock's farmhouse, Ben looked around eagerly. It didn't seem like much—a shabby farmhouse and weathered barn—a scene straight out of Kansas. Ben hid his disappointment; somehow he'd imagined the famous man's studio as being more like the City of Oz. Then, suddenly, the class came upon the artist himself. Mr. Pollock had laid his large canvas outside on the ground on a piece of thick cloth. He was concentrating on his work and didn't look up at their arrival. Miss Zanders took them closer but told them to be quiet and watch without interrupting.

4 Mr. Pollock didn't paint with a brush like other artists. Instead, he dipped a stick into a can of paint and then dripped or flung it onto the canvas. Bent in half like a jack-knife, he paced around the canvas to paint from all angles, his movements quick and confident. The painting was already a dense tapestry of black and white drops and streaks of paint, but he continued to weave white paint and then more black into the warp and weft¹ in an ever-changing pattern.

5 Ben noticed the artist's boots were speckled with paint, and there even seemed to be paint on the soles. A moment later Ben knew why, as he watched Mr. Pollock step right onto the canvas. He left an indelible print on the painting, like a fossil of an ancient sea creature in a piece of rock.

6 For a long time the students remained all but invisible; Mr. Pollock had given no sign that he knew the class was there. Suddenly, he began to talk as he painted, still not looking at his visitors but giving information about what he was doing that was clearly meant for them. He explained that he liked to paint directly, not from drawings or sketches, so he could express his feelings spontaneously. Mr. Pollock wanted to make his paintings as real as possible. Ben nodded, thinking it was like the difference between seeing a photo of a roller coaster ride and experiencing the real thing.

¹ In weaving, the warp is the vertical threads and the weft is the thread woven horizontally between them to create a piece of cloth.



7 Mr. Pollock continued, explaining that he liked to work outside because he felt more at home working in a large area. Putting the canvas on the ground allowed him to move freely around the large canvases he liked to use. This helped him feel like he was a part of the painting itself. He called his style “action painting,” and Ben could see why. Compared to Mr. Pollock, other artists were statues in front of their easels.

8 With no warning, Mr. Pollock placed one last drop of paint on the canvas, put the paint can and stick down, and stood up. Each painting had a life of its own, he explained, and this one was ready to live. Finally looking at the students directly, the artist invited them to look more closely at his finished work.

9 As Ben moved closer, he could feel the electric power and energy of the painting, and he shivered at its extraordinary effect on his senses. It was only black and white paint, but somehow it *did* live, as much as he or Miss Zanders or Mr. Pollock did. In a way, the painting *was* Mr. Pollock, or at least a part of him. Ben realized that this was the magic he had hoped to discover—what he loved about abstract painting—and that Mr. Pollock was a masterful wizard. Ben felt that each image created by Mr. Pollock gave him a glimpse into the man’s soul. This was Oz after all, and Ben never wanted to leave.

10 On the drive home, visions of the art he wanted to create floated about in Ben’s head. He would try Mr. Pollock’s style of action painting, but he also wanted to work with large blocks of vivid color to create fluid movements and rhythms. He knew it would take some time to figure out how to paint himself, his soul, as well as Mr. Pollock did his. But that was the goal, the magic, the way to Oz, and Ben knew it was only a matter of time before he found it for himself.

Answer the questions. Mark your answers to questions 1–3 on the Answer Form to the right.

Answer Form

1 (A) (B) (C) (D)

2 (A) (B) (C) (D)

3 (A) (B) (C) (D)

**Number
Correct****3****1**

Read the sentence from paragraph 2 of the story.

It seemed almost mystical, like turning straw into gold, and Mr. Pollock was a master.

How does the author’s allusion to “turning straw into gold” from the folktale “Rumpelstiltskin” contribute to your understanding of Ben’s feelings about abstract art and artists?

- A** It expresses his beliefs that modern painting techniques produce bright, colorful art.
- B** It stresses Ben’s desire to turn himself into a famous abstract artist when he gets older.
- C** It emphasizes Ben’s sense of the magical nature of the artistic process.
- D** It reveals his admiration for Mr. Pollock’s ability to create valuable art from simple paints.



2

Read this line from paragraph 4 of the story.

The painting was already a dense tapestry of black and white drops and streaks of paint. . . .

What does the analogy of the tapestry reveal about the painting?

- A The many lines and layers of paint created an abstract pattern on the canvas.
- B The thick canvas and thread-like paint streaks made fossil-like prints and patterns.
- C The artist used a sketch he had made to reproduce a tapestry in black and white.
- D The black and white pattern grew as the artist paced around the canvas.

3

What is the purpose of the author's use of phrases such as "electric power and energy" and "shivered at its extraordinary effect" in paragraph 9?

- A They create a solemn, respectful tone about the painter's unusual style.
- B They reflect a tone of excitement and intensity about the painting.
- C They signal a change from a tone of indifference to one of interest in the artist's explanation.
- D They build a sense of suspense and mystery about the life of the artist.

4

Explain how the allusions to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* contribute to the meaning and tone of the story. Use at least **two** details from the text in your response.



Self Check

Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 143.