

Allegory

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January 2008

Objective: Students will be able to define what an allegory is and tell of its literary importance.

Materials: Five clear jars or glasses half-filled with water, food coloring, a piece of green and blue paper, laminates of allegorical paintings and sculpture (included).

Hook: Color each jar with food coloring - one pure yellow, one red, one green, and one blue. Then prepare a fifth jar with a color that is blue/green—make sure it could be defined as either color. Show the class the four glasses of food coloring and ask what color each one is. The students should easily be able to unanimously describe each color (“Red!” “Blue!” etc.) Then show the class the jar that is blue/green and ask what color it is. There should be some discrepancy. Hold up the green paper next to the jar. Ask, “What color is it now?” Then hold up the blue piece of paper and pose the same question. The idea is that the color of the water appears to change according to the surroundings.

Discussion: Do you think you are more like the jars that are just one color, or the jar that could be two different colors? Are you the same person at school as you are in your house? What about around different friends, do you act differently?

Human beings are mixes of many different sentiments, opinions, and ideas. When we read a book, we read about people that are just like us, able to make mistakes. Sometimes, in order to teach us a lesson, an author will use a tool called *allegory* in which the characters are personifications of virtues or vices. It is easy to distinguish between right and wrong when you are looking at pure representations of character traits.

Explain allegory, emphasizing the fact that allegories reflect pure characters, not human mixture of good/bad. The Encarta Dictionary defines allegory as: “a work in which the characters and events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper, often spiritual, moral, or political meaning” (http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary/_allegory.html).

Can anyone think of a movie or book that you’ve seen that might be considered an allegory?

Show examples of allegorical paintings and photographs (included), and explain the allegory of each.

Activity: In groups of three or four students, have them act out scenes where each person is an allegorical character. For example: give a group the conflict of someone at a party; she wants to dance and have fun, but she is too shy. Have the characters be: EXTROVERT, TIMIDNESS, and the main character is a normal person. Make sure to point out that allegorical characters are complete and ALWAYS follow their descriptions (a normal person might eventually get tired or want to be alone, but EXTROVERT is ALWAYS social, and TIMIDNESS is ALWAYS shy). So it’s not just a matter of acting outgoing, but becoming pure extroversion.

Examples of other scenarios:

-Someone trying on clothes at the mall and getting the opinion of his/her friends. Characters: HONESTY, FLATTERY and the normal person trying on clothes. Remember, HONESTY is ALWAYS truthful, even if it's rude. FLATTERY will tell the person he/she looks good in everything.

-Three people trying to decide what to eat at a restaurant. Characters: OVERINDULGENCE, DIET, and a normal person trying to balance out the two.