FUNDAMENTALS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

alliteration — repetition of consonant sounds; "She sells sea shells down by the sea shore..."

allusion — a reference to history or literature, including the Bible and mythology; "My father has the patience of Job."

analogy — a comparison between two things to show how they are alike
"Imagination is your staircase to adventure."
from *The Tyger* by William Blake

catalogue — a list
"I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of growing wheat, gossip of flames, clack of sticks cooking my meals."
from *Song of Myself* by Walt Whitman

hyperbole — exaggeration used for effect or for humor
Mark Twain, the master of hyperbole, writes about Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*
When Tom Sawyer takes the sleeping Jim's hat and hangs it on a limb of a tree, Jim overreacts: Afterward Jim said the witches bewitched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the state, and then set him under the tree again, and hung his hat on a limb to show who done it.

irony — The three types of irony include the following:

verbal irony – saying the opposite of what you mean
In *Julius Caesar,* Antony refers to Brutus as "an honorable man" when Antony really despises Brutus for murdering Caesar.

dramatic irony – occurs when the reader/audience knows something that a character does not know, so that words or actions have meanings about which the character is unaware.
For example, in *To Kill a Mockingbird,* Scout unknowingly diffuses a potentially dangerous situation at the jail involving Atticus and some men who want to lynch Atticus' client, Tom Robinson. Scout's friendliness towards one of the men, Mr. Cunningham, shames him and results in his leaving and taking the other men with him.

situational irony -- when what actually happens is different from what is expected to happen
We see situational irony in Poe's *Cask of Amontillado* when Montressor appears to insist that Fortunato leave the catacombs

because of his persistent cough, but we know that Montressor is actually luring Fortunato deeper into the catacombs with evil intent.

metaphor one of the best known figures of speech which is used as a comparison between two unlike things without using the words "like, as, than, seems, resembles"
A simple metaphor may occur once in a work, or it may be used throughout a part or all of the work as an extended or controlling metaphor.

The kinds of metaphors include the following:

1. directly stated metaphor
The following is from Anne Sexton's poem *Young*:
"...my mother's window a funnel
of yellow heat running out..."

Sexton compare her mother's window to a funnel.

2. implied metaphor – the two terms of the comparison are not directly stated
The following is from *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
"It was a glorious resurrection from the tomb of slavery to the heaven of freedom."

Douglass compares freedom to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*3. dead metaphor – a metaphor used so often that it has lost its freshness and intensity
"father is the breadwinner"

*4. mixed metaphor - a metaphor which fails because its two parts are incompatible
"sly as a kitten"

onomatopoeia words which suggest or sound like their meanings
buzz, thump, hiss

oxymoron a combination of words which are apparently contradictory
deafening silence, bittersweet, cruel kindness, jumbo shrimp

paradox a statement which seems contradictory but is actually true
Dickens' famous statement from *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."

personification giving human traits to something non-human

Carl Sandburg's poem *Fog* states that, "the fog comes on little cat feet"; a specific kind of personification is anthropomorphism which refers to giving human characteristics to animals or objects: "The fox pondered the best strategy to capture the hen."

simile — a comparison between two unlike things using the words like, as, than, seems, or resembles

"As a twig trembles, which a bird
Lights on to sing, then leaves unbent,
So is my memory thrilled and stirred –
I only know she came and went...."
From She Came and Went by James Russell Lowell

An epic simile or extended simile is more involved or is carried throughout part or all of a work.
In *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,* Jonathan Edwards warns, "The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present...and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course when once it is let loose."
(This epic simile is carried throughout a long paragraph.)

understatement — a statement that says less than is meant; deliberately down-playing something for the purpose of emphasis, humor, or irony

In the poem *To His Coy Mistress,* Andrew Marvell writes:
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

*dead metaphor and mixed metaphor are poor examples of figurative language. Hopefully, you will not find them in a work by a respected author, nor should you use them in your own writing.

ASSIGNMENT 1: GROUP 1 PRACTICE

MATCH THE FOLLOWING FIGURES OF SPEECH WITH THE CORRECT EXAMPLES IN THE QUOTES BELOW (see underlined words for clues). Be prepared to discuss your answers with the class when everyone is finished.

alliteration catalogue onomatopoeia personification

1. *Change: From What to What* by Congresswoman Barbara Jordan
"Equity means all will sacrifice -- equally. That includes the retiree living on a fixed income, the day laborer, the corporate executive, the college professor, the Member of Congress... all means all."

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2. *The Petrified Forest* by Robert E. Sherwood

"...Nature is hitting back. Not with the old weapons – floods, plagues, holocausts. We can neutralize them. She's fighting back with strange instruments called neuroses. She's deliberately inflicting mankind with the jitters....She's taking the world away from the intellectuals and giving it back to the apes."

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3. *A Defence of Poetry* by Percy Bysshe Shelley

"A poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds."

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4. *Speech Against Conscription and War* by Emma Goldman

"...the more of the human voice you suppress, the greater and louder and the profounder will be the human voice. At present it is a mere rumbling, but that rumbling is increasing in volume, it is growing in depth, it is spreading all over the country..."

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ASSIGNMENT 2: GROUP 1

MATCH EACH EXAMPLE WITH THE CORRECT FIGURE OF SPEECH (see underlined words for clues). Try to determine what these figures of speech contribute to the passages below. Be prepared to discuss your opinions with the class. The first one has been done for you.

alliteration catalogue onomatopoeia personification

1. *I Saw Grief* by Jalaluddin Rumi

"I saw grief drinking a cup of sorrow and called out, 'It tastes sweet, does it not?' 'You've caught me,' grief answered, 'and you've ruined my business, how can I sell sorrow when you know it's a blessing?' "

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2. *Speech Against Conscription and War* by Emma Goldman

"He promised you heaven, he promised you everything if you would only place him in power. What made you place him in power? You expected peace and not war. The moment you placed him in power, however, he forgot his promises and he is giving you hell."

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3. *Science and Health* by Mary Baker Eddy

"God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love."

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4. *Taming the Bicycle* by Mark Twain

"This time the Expert took up the position of shortstop, and got a man to shove up behind. We got up a handsome speed, and presently traversed a brick, and I went out over the top of the tiller and landed, head down, on the instructor's back, and saw the machine fluttering in the air between me and the sun. It was well it came down on us, for that broke the fall, and it was not injured."

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ASSIGNMENT 7: GROUP 3

Match each example with the correct figure of speech.

hyperbole irony oxymoron paradox understatement

Reminder: An oxymoron consists of several (usually 2 words) that are conflicting; a paradox is a situation that seems conflicting, but is actually true.

1. *A Tribute to Abraham Lincoln* by Carl Sandburg

"Not often in the story of mankind does a man arrive on earth who is both steel and velvet, who is as hard as rock and soft as drifting fog."

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2. *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell

"When Scarlett O'Hara walked through Atlanta's hospital tents, she saw living death on the faces of the men."

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3. *The Crisis, No. 1* by Thomas Paine

"Not all the treasures of the world, so far as I believe, could have induced me to support an offensive war, for I think it murder...."

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4. "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated."
by Mark Twain

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5. *Taming the Bicycle* by Mark Twain
After numerous mishaps when trying to learn how to ride a bicycle, Mark Twain finally masters the art, and gives the following advice: "Get a bicycle. You will not regret it, if you live.

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GROUP 4: ALLUSIONS

Some sources do not consider allusions to be figurative language, and other sources definitely consider them to be figurative language. However, all sources consider them important. Just call them allusions and don't worry about conflicting sources.

An allusion is (1) a reference to history, (2) to literature, (3) to mythology. You will find them throughout literature, especially references to the Bible and to Shakespeare's works. Often a real understanding of what you are reading requires your recognition of the allusion and some knowledge of the work or the event to which the allusion refers. Many classical authors use allusions to clarify meaning and to add depth to their writing. Persuasive writing is another format in which allusions are frequently seen because allusions add clarification and emphasize a point the author wants to make. You may see allusions all around you -- on television, radio, advertisements, etc., in addition to literature and non-fiction -- as you become more aware. Some students who are avid readers or who are knowledgeable about the Bible may be more familiar with allusions than others.

At this point, you need to begin a list of allusions for reference purposes. Be prepared to share and to discuss the allusions that you find with the rest of the class. The more reading that you do in your AP classes, the more allusions you will encounter. But you will find that literature is not the only source of allusions; movies, television, politics, and more are possible sources, so keep alert for them. Keep a list and use them in your own writing when appropriate. The more allusions you know, the better prepared you will be for AP writing.

Following are examples of each kind of allusion.

I. <u>LITERARY ALLUSIONS</u>

BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS are found throughout non-fiction writing, and you must learn to recognize them as well as the stories behind them in order to understand the literary works you will be reading.

The Bible is very important literature in the AP classroom because it plays a significant role in analysis, and the use of it in this curriculum is for literary reasons only. It has been used in prompts on the exams and in numerous allusions there. Many outstanding authors use it often in their writing, as well. No attempt to influence you about your religious beliefs is intended.

EXAMPLE
An orator of great skill, Patrick Henry used a variety of allusions in his famous speech.

Speech to the Virginia Convention **by Patrick Henry**

Urging his fellow Americans to be wary of England's supposed concern, he states, "Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss."

This is a Biblical allusion to the actions of Judas, who betrayed Jesus to the Roman soldiers by kissing him. Judas pretended to show affection for Jesus, but was really identifying him for the Roman soldiers to arrest. Thus, the name "Judas" is associated with one who betrays.

EXAMPLE
In a sermon preached on the way to the New World, Puritan minister John Winthrop said, "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us." This is a reference to the Bible, Matthew 5:14: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid."

Knowing this allusion helps the reader to understand the Puritans' belief that they are the special people of God, sent by God on a mission to the New World. The Puritans felt that they must be the living example of God's people because they thought the world would be watching them. Visible to all on the top of the hill, they had to light the way for others.

EXAMPLE: CHARACTERS AND THEIR ACTIONS/PERSONALITIES

Also, sometimes you will encounter allusions to Biblical characters, such as Job, King Solomon, Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, and others. These particular allusions to characters are a kind of cross between allusion and symbol. A person referred to as a Job is one who suffers; the reference to Solomon is someone who is wise; and a reference to Cain is to a murderer because he killed his brother Abel. There is much that an author can suggest by simply using a name.

EXAMPLE: PARABLES (a story that teaches a lesson)

There are also parables found in the Bible which are sources for allusions. In the Bible, Jesus taught with parables. You need to familiarize yourself with some of these because, not only do you need to recognize them, you might want to incorporate them into your own writing. In other words, you can draw your own allusion.

ASSIGNMENT 9: GROUP 4, BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS

PROMPT

Read the following Biblical parables carefully. Then answer the questions which follow. Most allusions are taken from the King James version of the *Holy Bible.*

You may be familiar with the parable about the Good Samaritan who befriended a stranger.

1. *Holy Bible, Luke 10:25-37*

(25) "And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'
(26) He said unto him, 'What is written in the law? how readest thou?'
(27) And he answering said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.'
(28) And he said unto him, 'Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live.'
(29) But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'
(30) And Jesus answering said, 'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.'
(31) And by chance there came down a certain priest, that; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
(32) And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.
(33) But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.
(34) And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
(35) And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, 'Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.' _(36) 'Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?'
(37) And he said, 'He that showeth mercy on him.' Then said Jesus unto him, 'Go, and do thou likewise.'"

A. Give a brief synopsis of the story.

B. What moral or virtue does this parable teach?

C. What characteristic(s) of this man are admirable?

D. Can you think of someone you know or know about who can be compared to the Good Samaritan? Explain. Your example is an allusion to the Good Samaritan.

2. This is a parable about the house on the rock and the house on the sand.

Holy Bible, Matthew 7:24-27

(24)"'Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:
(25) 'And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and bear upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.'
(26)'And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:
(27) 'And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.'"

A. Give a brief synopsis of the story.

B. What moral or virtue does this parable teach?

C. Can you think of someone you know or know about who can be compared to either or both of the men in the parable? Explain. Your answer is an allusion.

The books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are filled with parables. Knowledge of these will help you to both recognize allusions to them and make your own allusions.

SHAKESPEAREAN ALLUSIONS are sometimes used in other literature. For example, the titles of Robert Frost's poem *Out, Out* and William Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury* are both allusions to one of Macbeth's speeches in which he laments the brevity of life:

"... Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

When an author alludes to the Bible or to Shakespeare, he/she is indicating a connection / comparison. For instance, Robert Frost's poem Out, Out tells the story of a boy's tragic death, a boy who was alive too briefly and then is heard no more, a pointless death which signif[ies] nothing. A simple allusion can reveal a great deal to the reader.

But Shakespearean allusions are not only found in literature; Shakespeare is also a source for non-fiction, even language that we use today.

For example, you may have heard someone quote the question asked by Julius Caesar of his friend Brutus after Brutus has stabbed him: "Et tu, Brute?" This question in Latin asks, "And you also, Brutus?" Caesar seems to be saying, "Even you, my closest friend, betrays me."

Or perhaps you have heard the advice that Polonius, in *Hamlet*, gives his son as he leaves home, "To thine own self be true."

And you may have heard the phrase from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, "All the world's a stage."

The list goes on and on and on. The more of Shakespeare that you read, the more you will recognize phrases, book titles, poems, television, movies, songs, etc., that are Shakespearean allusions. The same may be said for the Bible, as well as for other literature. Good literature is timeless, still as relevant today as when it was written, perhaps many, many years ago. Add allusions to your analysis vocabulary.

MYTHOLOGICAL ALLUSIONS

This includes references to the events and to the characters found in mythology.

In *Speech to the Virginia Convention*, Patrick Henry attempts to convince the assembled to take up arms against the British, despite their reluctance to accept the intentions of their mother country:

> "...it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of the siren, till she transforms us into beasts."

A siren is a mythical sea maiden who sang seductive songs to sailors (Oh, nice alliteration!), luring them to their death. Recognizing this allusion gives understanding of the author's use of "enchanted." The idea of the sirens adds a little romance to the poem and possibly an element of caution since the sirens' songs often distracted the sailors enough to cause them to wreck their ships on the rocks. Again, a brief allusion can reveal much.

Incidentally, take a look at the sentences which follow Henry's reference to sirens:

> **"Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we disposed to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation?"**

The underlined part is a Biblical allusion to *Ezekial 12:2*. Patrick Henry certainly knew the value of rhetorical techniques in persuasion!

III. HISTORICAL ALLUSIONS

These are references to actual persons and events from history that occur in speeches, essays, and even in daily life. You may have used them yourself in conversation and not realized that you were using an allusion.

EXAMPLE

"And within a few weeks, Saddam -- and yes, he is a venal, cruel, wicked, evil man -- was being transformed into the Hitler of Iraq, just as the Israelis had called Yasser Arafat the Hitler of Beirut in 1982...."

from *The Independent*, 1998

You are not expected to recognize every allusion that you read, but you will be able to identify more and more as you read in your AP English classes.

ASSIGNMENT 10: GROUP 4

PROMPT
Explain each allusion and its purpose or relevance. See the example below.

EXAMPLE: **Point Counter Point *by Aldous Huxley***

"He had already been at work on it for more than seven years and as yet, he would say to anyone who asked him about the progress of the book...'It's a labor of Hercules.'"

This reference by Huxley is a mythological allusion to Hercules who had to perform twelve immense labors or tasks. This allusion shows the difficulty of the task of writing a book.

1. ***The Independent*, 1993**

"Virginia is the No. 1 source-state for handguns on the East Coast... .We must stop the trafficking or become known as the Grim Reaper State."

2. ***New York Times*, 1993**
"Mr. Perot transformed a tale about fistfights during a union-certification campaign (which the union won) into the 20th - century equivalent of the Haymarket riot. This small-minded appeal to jingoism not only batters facts, it also makes the U. S. look like the Cowardly Lion of world politics."

3. ***The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*** **by Alan Sillitoe**

"...he remembered her, and not too tall, with almost masculine features below short chestnut hair: brown eyes, full cheeks and proportionate lips, like Aphrodite his inward eye had commented time and time again, only a little sweeter."

4. ***The Island of the Day Before*** **by Umberto Eco**

"Flowers, shrubs, sapplings had been brought her with their roots and earth, and set in baskets and makeshift cases. But many of the containers had rotted; the earth had spilled out to create, from one container to the next, a layer of damp humus, where the shoots of some plants were already taking root. It was like being in an Eden...."

5. *Our Gang* by Philip Roth

"Many seem to believe that you are destined to be to the unborn what Martin Luther King was to the black people of America...."

6. *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac

"I could feel the road some twenty inches beneath me, unfurling and flying and hissing at incredible speeds across the groaning continent with that mad Ahab at the wheel."

7. *Denver Post*, 1994

"And they were freighted, apparently, with an internal feud of Montague and Capulet proportions."

8. *Ever Since Darwin* by Stephen Jay Gould

"Summarized briefly, mainstream pop ethology contends that two lineages of hominids inhabited Pleistoene Africa. One, a small, territorial carnivore, evolved into us; the other, a larger, presumably gentle herbivore, became extinct. Some carry the analogy of Cain and Abel to its full conclusion and accuse our ancestors of fratricide."

9. *The Independent on Sunday*, 1995

"Without a win in five matches, the Cup represents the chance for Newcastle to bring tangible reward for a once refreshing approach, just as next Sunday's home match against Manchester United appears a last tilt at the Championship windmill."

10. *Op-Center* by Tom Clancy and Steve Pieczenik

"He still had what Donald once described as that 'last Texican at the Alamo look': ready, willing, and able to go down fighting."

EXAMPLE: WRITING ABOUT FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

PROMPT

Read the following passage, taken from a letter by George Bernard Shaw on the death of his mother, looking carefully for figurative language. Then identify specific examples and discuss Shaw's use of these to reveal his attitude toward his mother and her cremation.

"At the passage 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust' there was a little alteration of the words to suit the process. A door opened in the wall; and the violet coffin mysteriously passed out through it and vanished as it closed. People think that door is the door of the furnace; but it isn't. I went behind the scenes at the end of the service and saw the real thing. People are afraid to see it; but it is wonderful. I found there the violet coffin opposite another door, a real unmistakable furnace door this time; when it lifted there was a plain little chamber of cement and fire-brick. No heat, no noise. No roaring draught. No flame. No fuel. It looked cool, clean, sunny. You would have walked in or put your hand in without misgiving. Then the violet coffin moved again and went in, feet first. And behold! The feet burst miraculously into streaming ribbons of garnet coloured lovely flame, smokeless and eager like pentecostal tongues, and as the whole coffin passed in, it sprang into flame all over; and my mother became that beautiful...The door fell; well, they said that if we wanted to see it all through to the end, we should come back in an hour and a half. I remembered the wasted little figure with the wonderful face, and said, 'Too long' to myself -- but off we went...When we returned, the end was wildly funny; Mama would have enjoyed it enormously. We looked down through an opening in the floor. There we saw a roomy kitchen, with a big cement table and two cooks busy at it. They had little tongs in their hands, and they were deftly and busily picking nails and scraps of coffin handles out of Mama's dainty little heap of ashes and samples of bone. Mama herself being at the moment leaning over beside me, shaking with laughter. Then they swept her up into a sieve and shook her out; so that there was a heap of dust and a heap of bone scraps. And Mama said in my ear, 'Which of the two heaps do you suppose is me?'...and that merry episode was the end, except for making dust of the bone scraps and scattering them on a flower bed...O grave, where is thy victory?...And goodnight, friends who understand about one's mother."