

# Allegory

Allegory is a literary device used to express large, complex ideas in an approachable manner. Allegory allows writers to create some distance between themselves and the issues they are discussing, especially when those issues are strong critiques of political or societal realities.

Allegory is used in writing to express large, sometimes abstract ideas, or to comment on society. In some cases, such as in the classic political allegory novel *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell, allegory gives the author cover to talk about controversial ideas that otherwise might be too dangerous to talk about explicitly.

There are several different types of allegory, each serving a different purpose. They include:

- **Biblical allegory.** Biblical allegory invokes themes from the Bible, and often explores the struggle between good and evil. One example of Biblical allegory is C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The lion, Aslan, represents a Christ character,

who is the rightful ruler of the kingdom of Narnia. Aslan sacrifices himself for Edmund, the Judas figure, and is resurrected to rule over Narnia once again. Biblical allegory can also refer to allegorical interpretations of the Bible, which differ from literal interpretations, and were popular in the Middle Ages.

- Classical allegory. One of the best known allegories in classical literature is Plato's Allegory of the Cave. In this story, Plato imagines people living in a cave, only ever seeing objects as shadows reflected on the wall from the light of a fire—rather than seeing the objects directly. Plato used the cave as a symbolic representation of how humans live in the world, contrasting reality versus our interpretation of it.
- Modern allegory. Modern allegory includes many instances of a phenomenon called “allegoresis,” which refers to the interpretation of works as allegorical without them necessarily being intended that way. For example, there is an ongoing debate among readers about J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings series, and

whether or not the books were written as an allegory for World War I.

### Examples:-

Allegory has been used in literature over hundreds of years. Here are some prominent allegory examples.

- George Orwell, *Animal Farm*. *Animal Farm* is a great example of allegory, and is often taught in high school English classes to introduce the concept. In this farm fable, animals run a society that divides into factions and mirrors the rise of Leon Trotsky and the Russian Revolution. The story can be read as a fable of farm animals running a society, or it can be interpreted as the author's criticism of communism.
- Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*. *The Faerie Queene* is an English epic poem published originally in 1590. In this poem, Spenser established the Spenserian stanza. The poem follows several Arthurian knights, and explores twelve virtues. However, the poem was

widely read as a commentary on the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. (Whether the commentary is positive or negative continues to be debated by academics and critics today.)

- Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*. In Hawthorne's novel, set in the 1600s but published in 1850, Hester Prynne is forced to undergo public humiliation, including wearing the scarlet letter "A" (standing for "adulteress") after she becomes pregnant out of wedlock. The scarlet letter is itself an allegorical representation of sin, and how society punishes it. The novel can be read as a criticism of the hypocrisy of a Puritanical society.
- Aesop's Fables. These fables were originally part of an oral tradition in ancient Greece, and are credited to an ancient Greek slave named Aesop. They are a collection of fables, often aimed at children, that offer guidance on a wide variety of social, political, and religious topics. Aesop's Fables are allegory in the form of instructive lessons—stories that teach children how to behave and what to value.