**Allusions**

Classical

Biblical

Historical

**Classical Allusions**

**Gordian Knot**

An intricate knot, seemingly impossible to untangle, which was eventually sliced in half by Alexander the Great. Useful for emphasising obtrusive complexity.

**Sword of Damocles**

A sword that dangled over King Dionysius’s throne by a single horse hair. Useful for conveying the oppressive feeling of an impending sense of doom.

**Delphic Oracle**

In his temple in Delphi, Apollo conveyed cryptic prophecies through an oracle. Useful for describing predictions or messages that are challengingly obscure.

**Pandora’s Box**

A box that once contained all the evils of the world. Useful for highlighting the far-reaching and troubling consequences of a seemingly innocuous action.

**Deus ex Machina**

A plot device that brings an immediate and unlikely resolution to a narrative. Useful for highlighting where a seemingly unsolvable situation has been brought to a surprisingly happy conclusion.

**Sisyphus**

The father of Odysseus, forced to endlessly roll a boulder up a hill only to watch it roll back down. Useful for illustrating a task’s futility.

**Dionysus**

The Greek god of, amongst other things, wine, winemaking and revelry. Useful for emphasising giddy extremes of hedonism and celebration.

**Cassandra**

The daughter of King Priam, gifted with the ability to prophesise, but also cursed never to be believed. Useful for drawing attention to the uncanny ability that some possess to predict disastrous events that appear unlikely.

**Icarus**

The son of Daedalus who flew too close to the sun and crashed into the sea. Useful for highlighting the perils of excessive ambition.

**Proteus**

An ancient deity and protector of the seas who possessed the ability to transform into different shapes and forms. Useful for indicating rapid, mercurial changeability.



**Biblical Allusions**

**King Solomon**

Solomon, also known as Jeddiah, was a wealthy and powerful king of Israel. Useful for emphasising the wisdom of a particular judgement.

**Job’s Comforters**

Job’s friends tried to comfort him amidst his plunging misfortune, but only made him feel worse. Useful for conveying misplaced (possibly malicious) attempts to provide comfort.

**Apostle (Doubting) Thomas**

Apostle Thomas, commonly referred to as Doubting Thomas, refused to believe that Jesus had been resurrected. Useful for indicating stubborn scepticism.

**Sodom**

A large city whose residents had a notorious reputation for indulging in sinful acts. Useful for drawing attention to ribald and lascivious behaviour.

**King David and Bathsheba**

King David had an illicit affair with Bathsheba and was punished for doing so by God. Useful for illustrating where an act of great immorality has been committed.

**Lazarus of Bethany**

Lazarus of Bethany was brought back from the dead after four days by Jesus. Useful for highlighting extraordinary reappearances or recoveries.

**The Lake of Fire**

The Lake of Fire (and brimstone) is a place of eternal torment for the very wicked. Useful for demonstrating the severity of a punishment.

**Pontius Pilate**

Pontius Pilate presided over the trial of Jesus and, under pressure, gave the order for his crucifixion. Useful for helping to classify weak or unjust leaders.

**Alpha and Omega**

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, used symbolically to emphasise that Jesus is the creator of all life. Useful for indicating where a decision or action is intended to be wholly comprehensive.

**Cana Wedding**

Jesus turned water into wine at a marriage ceremony in Cana. Useful for highlighting the occurrence of a noteworthy and highly improbable event.



**Historical Allusions**

**Machiavellian**

The Prince, written by Niccolò Machiavelli in the sixteenth century, explores the unscrupulous and ruthless world of Renaissance politics. Useful for characterising devious, manipulative leaders.

**Draconian**

Draco was a Greek legislator, famous for imposing and upholding exceptionally strict laws. Useful for indicating the uncompromising, harsh application of a particular rule or policy.

**Hackneyed**

The Hackney is a common breed of horse, notable in the past for pulling carts and carriages all over England. Useful for suggesting that an idea lacks originality and also for emphasising banality.

**Pyrrhic Victory**

King Pyrrhus of Epirus (northwest Greece) defeated the Romans in two separate battles but, in doing so, his army suffered huge casualties. Useful for drawing attention to a particularly damaging, or ruinous, victory.

**Watergate**

The Watergate political scandal resulted in the impeachment and eventual resignation of President Richard Nixon. Useful for emphasising the immorality, or illegality, of a clandestine set of actions.

**Crossing the Rubicon**

Julius Caesar and his army crossed the Rubicon River in northwest Italy in 49BC and, in doing so, began a civil war. Useful for referring to an action or event that signals an irrevocable action.

**Fiddling Whilst Rome Burns**

In 64AD, a large part of Rome was destroyed by a great fire that ravaged the city for nearly a whole week while the emperor Nero occupied himself by playing music. Useful for highlighting ineffectual leadership.

**McCarthyism**

Joseph McCarthy was the senator in charge of the executing President Truman’s order that American civil service employees should be screened to test for communist leanings. Useful for defining a climate of paranoia and distrust.

**Custer’s Last Stand**

The American cavalry general George Custer and his men were defeated at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876 by a large force of Sioux and Cheyenne fighters. Useful for helping to dramatise a battle and eventual defeat against a more powerful foe.

**Carrying Coals to Newcastle**

The North East, famed once for its coal industry, produced a quarter of Britain’s coal in 1913. Useful for highlighting the futility or pointlessness of an action.

