Year 8 Term 4 Allusions – Revision List

Week 1

**Siren song:** Something that is irresistible even if you know it’s bad for you.

**Origin:** In Greek mythology, sirens were winged creatures who lured sailors to steer their ships into the rocks by singing so beautifully that they could not resist coming closer.

**Sour grapes:** when someone says negative things about something because they’re secretly jealous.

**Origin:** in one of Aesop’s fables, a fox wants a bunch of grapes but can’t reach them no matter how hard he tries. He walks away saying “the grapes are sour.”

**Waterloo:** A situation that ends in failure, or a challenge that cannot be overcome. If someone has "met their Waterloo", it means they have been defeated.

**Origin:** The battle of Waterloo (in present-day Belgium) in 1815 was where Napoleon finally lost, after many victories.

**Kryptonite:** a weakness; something that hurts or damages someone who is normally strong.

**Origin:** in the comics, kryptonite is a substance that makes Superman lose his powers.

**Grinch:** akilljoy, someone who dislikes holidays or celebrations and spoils the enjoyment for everyone.

**Origin:** In Dr. Seuss’s book, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the Grinch hates Christmas and decides to ruin it for the whole town by stealing all the presents.

Week 2

**Narcissism:** a mental disorder where someone is extremely self-absorbed. People who are narcissistic need constant attention or admiration, don’t understand or care about other people’s feelings, and can’t handle any criticism.

**Origin:** in Greek mythology, Narcissus was a handsome young man who fell in love with his own reflection.

**Golden Ticket**: a special privilege, unexpected opportunity, or stroke of good luck.

**Origin:** in Roald Dahl’s book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, a boy wins a trip to the amazing Wonka chocolate factory by finding a golden ticket in his chocolate bar.

**Einstein:** a genius or very smart person – sometimes used sarcastically.

**Origin:** Albert Einstein was a brilliant scientist who is famous for discovering the Theory of Relativity (“E=MC2”), among other things.

**Herculean task/Herculean effort:** requiring great strength, impossible or very hard to perform.

**Origin:** in Greek mythology, Hercules was a demigod with amazing strength. He was told he could gain immortality if he completed twelve ‘impossible’ tasks – called the Twelve Labours of Hercules.

**Pollyanna:** someone who is extremely (annoyingly) cheery and optimistic.

**Origin:** in the children’s book *Pollyanna* by Eleanor H Porter, the main character insists on remaining cheerful and finding something to be glad about, even in bad circumstances.

Week 3

**Carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders:** to be heavily burdened by many troubles or responsibilities

**Origin:** in Greek mythology, the titan Atlas was punished by being made to carry the world on his shoulders for eternity.

**White elephant:** an expensive item that is useless and a bother to look after.

**Origin:** the King of Siam would give an albino elephant, considered sacred, to any member of the court he disliked. Looking after it would be an expensive burden for them, but they would not be able to get rid of it.

**Cheshire cat grin:** a very wide grin, or an irritating and mischievous grin.

**Origin:** in Lewis Carrol’s *Alice in Wonderland* the Cheshire Cat had a wide grin and could disappear slowly until only his smile remained.

**Fifteen minutes of fame:** when someone or something becomes very famous all of a sudden, but then is forgotten about just as quickly.

**Origin:** A well-known artist in the 1960s, Andy Warhol, made the prediction that: “in the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes”.

**Pearls before swine:** to waste something valuable on someone who doesn’t appreciate it

**Origin:** in Matthew 5:6, Jesus uses this expression to describe trying to preach the gospel to those who have already rejected it.

Week 4

**Flying too close to the sun:** being over-confident or taking dangerous risks

**Origin:** in Greek mythology, the inventor Daedalus built wings from wax and feathers for his son Icarus. He warned him not to fly too close to the sun or the wax would melt, but Icarus did not listen and fell to his death.

**Scrooge:** someone who is mean and miserable, and hates spending any money.

**Origin:** In *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, Ebenezer Scrooge is a wealthy miser who hates Christmas and refuses to help an employee with an ill child, saying ‘bah, humbug!’

**Philistine:** someone who doesn’t care about or understand cultured things like art, music, or literature.

**Origin:** this is a reference to the Philistines in the Bible, enemies of Israel who were warlike people with no interest in learning about God.

**Gordian Knot:** a complicated problem that has a simple but unexpected solution.

**Origin:** according to legend, an oracle had foretold that whoever could untie a particular tangled knot would become ruler of all of Asia. Alexander the Great sliced it open with his sword.

**Bread & Circuses:** Entertainment that distracts people from serious problems

**Origin:** In ancient Rome, politicians would gain popularity by sponsoring gladiator contests and chariot races, where they handed out free bread. This tactic usually stopped people from complaining about the government.

Week 5

**El Dorado:** a place of great wealth or opportunity.

**Origin:** an ancient Spanish legend told of an Aztec city full of unimaginable riches and gold. Although it was only a myth, many explorers searched for it.

**Catch-22:** a frustrating, paradoxical situation where the solution is impossible or contradictory.

**Origin:** In the novel *Catch-22*, a man tries to claim insanity to get out of the air force. But the doctor says that requesting an evaluation for insanity shows that he is sane enough to realise that he is mad.

**The writing on the wall:** a warning or sign that something bad is going to happen.

**Origin:** This is a reference to the story of Belshazzar’s feast in Daniel 5. The king saw a hand writing a message on the wall. It was a warning from God that his kingdom would be destroyed.

**Boycott:** refusing to buy or use products from a company or person as a form of protest.

**Origin:** Charles Boycott, a land agent in Ireland in 1880, treated his workers poorly. As a protest, they banded together and refused to harvest his crops.

**Odyssey:** a long journey or quest

**Origin:** The Greek poet Homer wrote a famous epic poem called *The Odyssey*. The hero, Odysseus, takes ten years to journey home from the Trojan war.

Week 6

**Pandora’s box:** a source of unexpected problems, or a gift that turns out to be a curse.

**Origin:** in Greek mythology, Zeus gave Pandora a wedding present, a mysterious box, but warned her not to open it. She was curious and couldn’t resist. All the evils of the world flew out: greed, envy, hatred, war, and death.

**Big Brother, or “Big Brother is Watching”:** a government or authority that has complete power, limits people’s freedom, and tries to control their behaviour and thoughts, especially through surveillance.

**Origin:** in George Orwell’s dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the ruler “Big Brother” maintains total control over the population by monitoring them constantly. People are reminded of this by posters with the slogan “Big Brother is Watching You”

**Stonewall:** to delay or block something by being evasive or refusing to answer questions

**Origin:** this tactic is named after Confederate General Thomas J. Jackson during the American Civil War, who was described as "standing like a stone wall" as the enemy approached.

**Svengali:** someone who manipulates or controls another person for their own gain.

**Origin:** Svengali was the villain of the famous 1890s novel *Trilby.* He hypnotised a young woman to be a famous singer so that he could benefit from her fame and riches.

**Don Quixote/Quixotic:** a person or a plan that is foolishly idealistic, with noble goals that probably won’t work in the real world.

**Origin:** In the famous Spanish novel *Don Quixote*, the main character is known for his great chivalry and unrealistic schemes.

Week 7

**Jekyll & Hyde:** someone who has two very different sides to their character, or who seems different on the outside from what they’re really like

**Origin:** in the book *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, scientist Dr. Jekyll creates a potion that transforms him into his evil alter-ego, Mr. Hyde.

**Deus ex machina:** a plot device where something very convenient, unlikely, or magical suddenly happens and solves all the problems.

**Origin:** In ancient Greek theatre, actors playing the gods would be brought onto the stage using a crane. This was called ‘Deus ex Machina’ or ‘god from the machine’.

**Spartan:** very simple and not very comfortable. No modern conveniences or luxuries.

**Origin:** the ancient Spartans were known for their harsh lifestyle that focused on hard work, discipline, survival, and tough military training.

**McCarthyism:** the practice of making false accusations, especially in a public and attention-grabbing manner.

**Origin:** named after U.S. senator Joseph McCarthy who was known for using this tactic

**Fiddle while Rome burns:** to enjoy yourself or continue going on as normal while something important and disastrous is happening.

**Origin:** According to legend, during the great fires of Rome, Emperor Nero played his lyre while watching the spectacle from a high tower.

Week 8

**Et tu, brute?**: a phrase used to express dismay at betrayal from someone you thought was a friend

**Origin:** In Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar*, Caesar is stabbed in the back by a group of senators including Brutus, who was his friend and ally. His last words are “Et tu, Brute?” (Latin for “you too, Brutus?”)

**Man Friday:** a helpful and willing assistant or employee, who is clever and resourceful.

**Origin:** in the novel *Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Defoe, the main character befriends a native on the island where he is a castaway and calls him Friday (the day he found him).

**Sacred cow:** Something that is immune to any criticism or objections for no good reason.

**Origin:** American tourists in India in the 1900s were amazed that cows were considered sacred by Hindus and could not be moved out of the way even if they were blocking traffic.

**Cassandra:** a person whose valid warnings or concerns are ignored by others.

**Origin:** in Greek mythology, Cassandra was cursed with being able to see the future but having nobody believe her predictions.

**Ivory Tower:** Someone who is aloof, protected from the real world, and out of touch with reality.

**Origin:** A French poet, Alfred De Vigny, shut himself away in an ivory tower so that he could compose poems in peace.