Allusions

Allusions are everywhere. TV. Movies. Commercials. Billboards. Books. Songs. You name it. An allusion is a reference a text (see the list above) makes to another place, person, or event. They can refer to real or imaginary people, places, or events, or really anything: Opera, art, myths, religious stuff, folk tales. Sometimes, an allusion is obvious. Like when you call a boy “Romeo” for being romantic. Sometimes it is really complex and hidden, and you have to work to find it.

Why writers use them:

- They bring in the reader. It’s exciting when you know what they are saying, like a secret code. It makes it relevant and interesting.
- They help the writer make a point quickly. Comparing someone to a known character is a quick way to say all you may need to about that person.
- They give you a chance to sound all smart and amazing. Writers like to point out all the fancy classics they’ve read. It makes them feel accomplished. *I have read this and can use it in my writing, so I must be amazing.* Then, when you read it, you feel smarter too (unless you don’t catch it), and everyone wins. Yay reading!

How to spot them:

Read stuff and remember it. That’s it. Sometimes you have to look closely, but not always.

Example:

As I write this guide, I am reading *City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare. In it, she makes a lot of very sly allusions to pieces of famous literature. You probably won’t catch them all, I probably won’t catch them all, but we can try. Here’s one:

“Simon headed off toward the coffee bar, muttering under his breath something to the effect that *it was a far, far better thing he did now than he had ever done before.*”

This is a slight literary nod to the last line of *A Tale of Two Cities*:

"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known."

The allusion is small and tricky to catch, but it is there. Not all are like that. Many are obvious, like when commercials feature Zeus. Allusions are a great way to feel smarter when you are reading.