

# 9

## Lesson Nine

### FOCUS: Allusions

#### VOCABULARY WORDS

From “To the House”

**Hold**, *n.*

A fortified place; a stronghold

**Host**, *n.*

A multitude or great number;  
an army

**Temper**, *n.*

Hardness or strength imparted by  
treatment with heat, cold, or water

Most poets have an audience in mind when they write—an audience that will understand and appreciate their work. In endeavoring to communicate with that audience, poets sometimes use overt or subtle references—*allusions*—to tap shared cultural memories, or to enlarge the scope of their work. When, for instance, poets allude to a person, image, or event in Homer’s *Iliad* or the Bible, they presume readers will be familiar with those texts. In the same way, poets amplify the scope of their work by connecting images and ideas to outside sources. By using such words as “Trojan horse,” “Jezebel,” or “Gettysburg,” poets direct attention to wider, yet still familiar, circles of meaning.

Jeffers’s verse dramas such as *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, *Dear Judas*, *At the Beginning of an Age*, *Medea*, and *The Cretan Woman* drew upon ancient Greece, the Bible, and medieval Europe for inspiration. But even his shorter lyric poems interrogate the Western tradition as a whole and illuminate modern life, often using allusions from literature, history, science, and religion.



### Discussion Activities

In “To the House,” a poem written during the construction of Tor House, Jeffers refers to baptism, a traditional Christian ritual. He also compares the Pacific Ocean (both the expanse of water and the vast basin which holds it) to a baptismal font. Have students discuss the meaning of these allusions: Are they familiar? What do they mean? What function do they serve in this poem?

In “Hooded Night,” Jeffers refers to ancient Egypt and its pyramids. How, in a simple and economical way, do these allusions help him make his point? Jeffers also compares “the Versailles peace” to the “final unridiculous peace” of the Carmel coast. At the time the poem was written (in the 1920s), most people would have known what Jeffers had in mind. Can that be said for readers of today? Have students research what happened at Versailles.



### Writing Exercise

“Shine, Republic” situates American history within the context of Western civilization as a whole. Have students choose three allusions (from among the Roman Republic, the Greek victory at Marathon, America’s battle for independence at Concord, George Washington, Martin Luther, Tacitus, Aeschylus [Eschylus], or Julius Caesar), and explain their contribution to the meaning of the poem in a short essay. If students were writing a poem about the value of freedom in America, what allusions would they use?



### Homework

Read Jeffers’s poems “To the Stone-Cutters” and “Love the Wild Swan.” Also read “Jeffers and Culture” (p. 14) in the Reader’s Guide.