LITERARY ALLUSIONS

1. **An Albatross around One’s Neck** - sometimes used to mean an encumbrance, or a wearisome burden. It is an allusion to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In the poem, an albatross starts to follow a ship — being followed by an albatross was generally considered an omen of good luck. However, the ancient mariner shoots the albatross with a crossbow, which is regarded as an act that will curse the ship (which indeed suffers terrible mishaps). To punish him, his companions induce him to wear the dead albatross around his neck indefinitely (until they all die from the curse, as it happens). Thus the albatross can be both an omen of good or bad luck, as well as a metaphor for a burden to be carried (as penance).

2. **Babbitt** - a self-satisfied person concerned chiefly with business and middle-class ideals like material success; a member of the American working class whose unthinking attachment to its business and social ideals is such to make him a model of narrow-mindedness and self-satisfaction ; after George F. Babbitt, the main character in the novel *Babbitt* by Sinclair Lewis

3. **Brobdingnagian** - gigantic, enormous, on a large scale, enlarged ; after Brobdingnag, the land of giants visited by Gulliver in *Gulliver’s Travels*, by Jonathan Swift. Lilliputian - descriptive of a very small person or of something diminutive, trivial or petty; after the Lilliputians, tiny people in *Gulliver’s Travels*

4. **Catch-22** - a problematic situation for which the only solution is denied by a circumstance inherent in the problem or by a rule (e.g., you must stay out of the water until you know how to swim); also, the circumstance or rule that denies a solution; an illogical, unreasonable, or senseless situation; a measure or policy whose effect is the opposite of what was intended; a situation presenting two equally undesirable alternatives; a hidden difficulty or means of entrapment, from Joseph Heller’s novel *Catch-22*

5. **Silver Lining** - a comforting or hopeful aspect of an otherwise desperate or unhappy situation (from the proverbial phrase “Every cloud has a silver lining.”)

6. **Don Juan** - a profligate man obsessed with seducing women; after Don Juan, the legendary 14th century Spanish nobleman and libertine

7. **Falstaffian** - self-indulgent and vain, yet full of wit and bawdy humor; ; after Sir John Falstaff, a fat, sensual, boastful, and mendacious knight who was the companion of Henry, Prince of Wales, in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* plays

8. **Frankenstein/A Frankensteinian Monster** - Anything that threatens or destroys its creator; from the young scientist, Victor Frankenstein, in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, who creates a monster that eventually destroys him

9. **My Man Friday** - A faithful and willing attendant, ready to turn his hand to anything; from the young savage found by Robinson Crusoe on a Friday, and kept as his servant and companion on the desert island [from Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe*]

10. **Faustian Bargain/The Devil to Pay** – Dr. Faustus, a respected German scholar, makes a deal with Mephistopheles, an agent of Lucifer: his soul for supernatural power. For twenty-four years he will be granted everything he wishes, and always thereafter his soul will belong wholly to the Devil. The years pass quickly, and eventually the Devil must be paid. Of course, Faustus made a bad deal, a Faustian bargain. It’s the devil to pay when any onerous obligation must be met. [Christopher Marlowe made use of the legend in his play *Doctor Faustus*, as did Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in his FAUST.]

11. **Galahad** - A pure and noble man with limited ambition; in the legends of King Arthur, the purest and most virtuous knight of the Round Table, the only knight to find the Holy Grail

12. “**It’s [all] Greek to me”** – In recounting Caesar’s fainting episode and Cicero’s reaction to it in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar,* Casca says “those that understood him [Cicero] smiled at one another and shook their heads; but, for mine own part, it was Greek to me.” In other words, Cicero’s reaction to the incident was incomprehensible to Casca because he could not understand the more sophisticated Greek language used by the Senator and his cohorts.

13. **Green-Eyed Monster** – In the pretext of giving friendly advice, Iago warns Othello against being jealous of his popular wife. He says, “O beware, my lord, of jealousy! It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feed on,” referring to felines – cats, lions, leopards – that torment their prey before killing it. Because of Iago’s description of jealousy, it is often spoken of as the green-eyed monster. [From Shakespeare’s *Othello*]

14. **"Hoist with his own petard"** - to be caught up and destroyed by one’s own plot. Hamlet's actual meaning is "cause the bomb maker to be blown up with his own bomb", metaphorically turning the tables on Claudius, whose messengers (and would-be assassins) are killed instead of Hamlet. [From Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*]

15. **Jekyll and Hyde** - A capricious person with two sides to his/her personality; from a character in the famous novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* who had more than one personality, a split personality (one good and one evil)

16. **Malapropism** - The usually unintentional humorous misuse or distortion of a word or phrase, especially the use of a word sounding somewhat like the one intended, but ludicrously wrong in context - Example: polo bears. Mrs. Malaprop was a character noted for her misuse of words in R. B. Sheridan's comedy *The Rivals*

17. **Milquetoast** - a timid, weak, or unassertive person; from Casper Milquetoast, who was a comic strip character created by H.T. Webster

18. **The Piper Must be Paid** - refers to the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, a cautionary tale, if there ever was one. A wandering piper dressed in pied (colorfully patched) clothing has been employed by the town elders of Hamelin to rid the village of rats. He does so by playing a musical pipe to lure the rats with a song into a local river, where they all drown. When the elders refuse to pay him, the Pied Piper abducts all of the children in the village as punishment, leading them from the village and into a cave by playing his pipe. The children never return. The lesson of the tale: pay your debts (financial or otherwise) or face the consequences.

19. **Pollyanna** - a person characterized by impermissible optimism and a tendency to find good in everything, a foolishly or blindly optimistic person; from Eleanor Porter's heroine, Pollyanna Whittier, in the book *Pollyanna*

20. **Pooh-bah** - a pompous, ostentatious official, especially one who, holding many offices, fulfills none of them, a person who holds high office ; after Pooh-Bah Lord-High-Everything-Else, character in *The Mikado*, a musical by Gilbert and Sullivan

21. **Shylock/A Pound of Flesh** – Says Shylock in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, “The pound of flesh which I demand of him Is deerely bought, 'tis mine, and I will have it.” Calling one a shylock is saying that he or she is an avaricious, acquisitive, miserly individual. To say that a person is always demanding his “pound of flesh” is to say that he takes the last morsel of advantage he can possibly squeeze out of anyone without concern for the pain and anguish he may cause. The figurative use of the phrase to refer to any lawful but nevertheless unreasonable recompense dates to the late 18th century.

22. **Don Quixote** - someone overly idealistic to the point of having impossible dreams; from the crazed and impoverished Spanish noble who sets out to revive the glory of knighthood, romanticized in the musical “The Man of La Mancha” based on the novel *Don Quixote* by Cervantes; Quixotic/Tilting at Windmills - having foolish and impractical ideas of honor, or schemes for the general good, again after Don Quixote, the half-crazed reformer and knight protector of the supposed distressed

23. **Rodomontade** - bluster and boasting, to boast (rodomontading or rodomontaded); from Rodomont, a brave, but braggart knight in Bojardo's *Orlando Inamorato*; King of Sarza or Algiers, son of Ulteus, and commander of both horse and foot in the Saracen Army

24. **Shangri-La** - a fictional place described in the 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* by British author James Hilton. In the book, "Shangri-La" is a mystical, harmonious valley enclosed in the western end of the Kunlun Mountains. The people who live at Shangri-La are almost immortal, living years beyond the normal lifespan and only very slowly aging in appearance. Shangri-La has become synonymous with any earthly paradise but particularly a mythical Himalayan utopia — a permanently happy land, isolated from the outside world. Shangri-la is often used in a similar context to which "Garden of Eden" might be used, to represent an awesome paradise that exists hidden from modern man. It can sometimes be used as an analogy for a life-long quest or something elusive that is much sought. For a man who spends his life obsessively looking for a cure to a disease, such a cure could be said to be that man's "Shangri-La". It also might be used to represent perfection that is sought by man in the form of love, happiness, or Utopian ideals.

25. **Simon Legree** - a harsh, cruel, or demanding person in authority, such as an employer or officer that acts in this manner ; from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by abolitionist writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, the brutal slave overseer. Uncle Tom - someone thought to have the timid service attitude like that of a slave to his owner; from the humble, pious, long-suffering Negro slave in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

26. **Something Rotten in Denmark** - After the ghost of Hamlet’s father appears to Hamlet, Marcellus, and Horatio, Marcellus states that “something is rotten in the state of Denmark.” literally meaning that something is wrong with the government of Denmark. The ghost relates how his brother Claudius, the current king, murdered him so he could become king. Nowadays, when people say that there is “something rotten in [a place name],” the meaning is clear: there’s something brewing under the surface that isn’t right in [the place]. From Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

27. **Sour Grapes** - pretended disdain for something one does not or cannot have; from a fable of Aesop concerning the fox who, in an effort to save face, dismissed as sour those grapes he could not reach

28. **Tartuffe** - hypocrite or someone who is hypocritical; central character in a comedy by Moliere produced in 1667; Moliere was famous for his hypocritical piety

29. **Utopia** - an imaginary island described by Sir Thomas More in his *Utopia*, a book that offers a satirical view of an ideal society free of poverty and suffering. The expression utopia is coined from Greek words and means “no place,” suggesting the fantasy underlying any utopian model. The word is just as likely to be used pejoratively to describe an unrealistic ideal that is impossible to achieve.

30. **Walter Mitty** - a commonplace non-adventuresome person who seeks escape from reality through Daydreaming, a henpecked husband or dreamer; after a daydreaming henpecked "hero;" in a story by James Thurber, “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty”

31. **Whitewash a Fence/Pull a Tom Sawyer** – With the words “Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?” Tom Sawyer cleverly creates interest in a task that he himself would rather avoid having to do. Soon enough, Tom’s friends are actually paying him for the privilege of doing his work.

32. **Yahoo** - a boorish, crass, or stupid person; from a member of a race of brutes in Swift's *Gulliver’s Travels* who have the form and all the vices of humans.