

Allegory in Art

Decode the Allegory

LOCATION: North Pavilion, Gallery N203

Name _____

This was painted by German artist Hans Holbein the Younger in about 1532–1536.

It may have been painted for a scholar who saw this scene as his personal emblem, or logo.

The painting contains clues that tell you the meaning of the allegory. To figure out the meaning, identify the various objects in the painting—the symbols—and imagine what they could represent.



1 Take a moment to look carefully at this painting and then discuss the following questions with a partner.

Write your answers below.

a What two figures do you see in the painting?

1. _____

2. _____

b Think of three adjectives to describe how they are posed.

1. _____

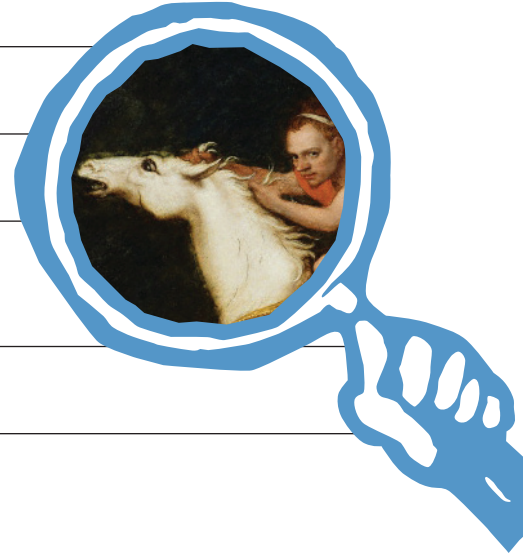
2. _____

3. _____



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c How do these two figures interact? _____



d Describe the facial expressions of both. _____

e What color do you notice first in this painting? _____

f What does this color mean to you? _____

g Describe the shape of the frame. _____

2 **With a partner, guess what allegory** the artist was trying to convey and defend your answer with details you see in the painting.

I think this painting is an allegory of _____

because _____



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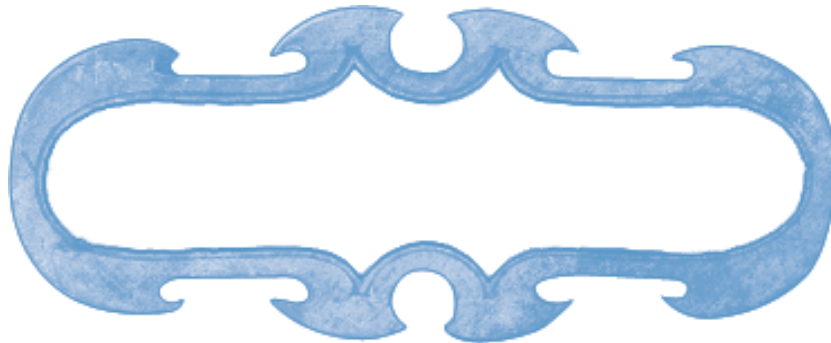
3 **Find the label** next to this painting; the title tells you the answer. Were you close? If you did not guess the allegory correctly, why do you think it was not apparent to you? Discuss with a partner.

4 **Next, look directly below** the man and the horse. Do you notice something written in the cartouche? (A cartouche is a scroll-like tablet used either to provide space for an inscription or to serve as an ornament.)

a The cartouche contains an Italian inscription, *E cosi desio me mena*, which means "And so desire carries me along." This is from the Italian poet Francesco Petrararch's *Song Book*, written about 1342.

b How do you think this inscription relates to the allegory? _____

c Think of your own inscription that could fit this painting:



5 Of all the animals the artist might have painted, why do you think he chose a horse?

How does it relate to the allegory?

I think Hans Holbein the Yonger chose a horse for this painting because:



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- 6 **Think of an emotion that you sometimes feel.** Then, think about an animal that could represent that feeling. Separate from your partner, draw a picture of yourself and this animal, trying to represent this emotion. When you are finished, see if your partner can guess the emotion you are trying to convey in the drawing.

Sketch
your picture
here!

