

# Intertextuality

## Definition of Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a sophisticated literary device making use of a textual reference within some body of text, which reflects again the text used as a reference. Instead of employing referential phrases from different literary works, intertextuality draws upon the concept, [rhetoric](#), or ideology from other writings to be merged in the new text. It may be the retelling of an old story, or the rewriting of popular stories in modern [context](#) for instance, James Joyce retells *The Odyssey* in his very famous novel *Ulysses*.

## Difference Between Intertextuality and Allusion

Although both these terms seem similar to each other, they are slightly different in their meanings. An [allusion](#) is a brief and concise reference that a writer uses in another [narrative](#) without affecting the storyline.

Intertextuality, on the other hand, uses the reference of the full story in another text or story as its backbone.

## Examples of Intertextuality in Literature

---

### Example #1: *Wide Sargasso Sea* (By Jean Rhys)

---

In his novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys gathers some events that occurred in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The purpose is to tell readers an alternative tale. Rhys presents the wife of Mr. Rochester, who played the role of a secondary [character](#) in *Jane Eyre*. Also, the [setting](#) of this novel is Jamaica, not England, and the author develops the back-story for his major character. While spinning the novel, *Jane Eyre*, Rhys gives her interpretation amid the narrative by addressing issues such as the roles of women, colonization, and racism that Brontë did not point out in her novel otherwise.

---

### Example #2: *A Tempest* (By Aime Cesaire)

---

Aime Cesaire's play *A Tempest* is an adaptation of *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. The author parodies Shakespeare's play from a post-colonial [point of view](#). Cesaire also changes the occupations and races of his characters. For example, he transforms the occupation of Prospero, who was a magician, into a slave-owner, and also changes Ariel into a Mulatto, though he was a spirit. Cesaire, like Rhys, makes use of a famous work of literature, and put a spin on it in order to express the themes of power, slavery, and colonialism.

---

### Example #3: *Lord of the Flies* (By William Golding)

---

William Golding, in his novel *Lord of the Flies*, takes the story implicitly from *Treasure Island*, written by Robert Louis Stevenson. However, Golding has utilized the concept of adventures, which young boys love to do on the isolated island they were stranded on. He, however, changes the narrative into a cautionary tale, rejecting the glorified stories of Stevenson concerning exploration and swash buckling. Instead, Golding grounds this novel in bitter [realism](#) by demonstrating negative implications of savagery and fighting that could take control of human hearts, because characters have lost the idea of civilization.

---

### Example #4: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (By C. S. Lewis)

---

In this case, C. S. Lewis adapts the idea of Christ's crucifixion in his [fantasy](#) novel, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He, very shrewdly, weaves together the religious and entertainment themes for a children's book. Lewis uses an important event from *The New Testament*, transforming it into a story about redemption. In doing so, he uses Edmund, a character that betrays his savior, Aslan. Generally, the motive of this [theme](#) is to introduce other themes, such as evil actions, losing innocence, and redemption.

---

### Example #5: *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (By Earnest Hemingway)

---

In the following example, Hemingway uses intertextuality for the title of his novel. He takes the title of a poem, *Meditation XVII*, written by John Donne. The excerpt of this poem reads:

“No man is an island ... and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

Hemingway not only uses this excerpt for the title of his novel, he also makes use of the idea in the novel, as he clarifies and elaborates the abstract philosophy of Donne by using the concept of the Spanish Civil War. By the end, the novel expands other themes, such as loyalty, love, and camaraderie.

### **Function of Intertextuality**

A majority of writers borrow ideas from previous works to give a layer of meaning to their own works. In fact, when readers read the new text with reflection on another literary work, all related assumptions, effects, and ideas of the other text provide them a different meaning, and changes the technique of interpretation of the original piece. Since readers take influence from other texts, and while reading new texts they sift through archives, this device gives them relevance and clarifies their understanding of the new texts. For writers, intertextuality allows them to open new perspectives and possibilities to construct their stories. Thus, writers may explore a particular ideology in their narrative by discussing recent rhetoric in the original text.