**Edgar Allan Poe**

**A Study**

**Your Name:**

**Period:**

# **Edgar Allan Poe**

# ****E****arly Life *(from biography.com)*

Edgar Allan Poe's evocative short stories and poems captured the imagination and interest of readers around the world. His imaginative storytelling led to literary innovations, earning him the nickname "Father of the Detective Story." Some aspects of his life, like his literature, are shrouded in mystery, and the lines between fact and fiction have been blurred substantially since his death.

Poe never really knew his parents — Elizabeth Arnold Poe, a British actress, and David Poe, Jr., an actor who was born in Baltimore. His father left the family early in Poe's life, and his mother passed away from tuberculosis when he was only three. Separated from his brother William and sister Rosalie, Poe went to live with John and Frances Valentine Allan, a successful tobacco merchant and his wife, in Richmond, Virginia. Edgar and Frances seemed to form a bond, but he had a more difficult relationship with John Allan. By the age of 13, Poe was a prolific poet, but his literary talents were discouraged by his headmaster and John Allan, who preferred that Poe follow him in the family business. Preferring poetry over profits, Poe reportedly wrote poems on the back of some of Allan's business papers.

# Later Life (*Taken from biographyshelf.com)*

The death of his parents, who were actors, could have been one of the factors that contributed to the macabre writings of Edgar Allan Poe. Ironically; however, it is their passing that gave Poe the opportunity to attend the prestigious Manor School at Stoke Newington in England from 1815 until 1820, paid for by his uncle John Allan. Here, he would have been exposed to the classics, and taught much about rhetoric and aesthetics that he came to write about and critique in his **latter** years.

Although not adopted by his uncle officially, Poe took his last name of “Allan”, which is often misspelled as the middle name “Allen”. Upon returning to the United States, Poe attended the University of Virginia for one year. In an attempt to get more spending money, Poe gambled away most of his tuition money that his uncle had provided him with. As a result, Poe was disowned and was forced to drop out from the university. Following, he joined the U.S. Army in an attempt to make a living and served for two years. During this time, he published his first book entitled Tamerlane and Other Poems. Upon admittance to West Point through his Uncle’s connections, Poe published another book called Al Aaraaf, and was deliberately discharged for not following orders.

In 1836, Edgar wed Virginia Eliza Clemm, who was 13 at the time and was his first cousin. Two years later, Poe released another tale called The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, which won him some national fame and allowed him to become the assistant and head editor of several prominent publications. In Edgar Allan Poe’s Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, published in 1839, Poe’s name was already well known.

Poe was always said to possess erratic behavior, mood swings, and dark gloom. While this isn’t quite accurate, many who read about his life or heard about him have been led partly astray with the publication of his biography by Rufus Griswold, which he called Poe’s “Memoirs”. Another, more accurate short biography of Edgar Allan Poe was released in 1875 by John Ingram, which is said to give an accurate portrayal of Poe according to those who actually knew him well.

It is known that Poe did become despaired when his wife, Virginia became ill with Tuberculosis, which led him to drinking and perhaps drug use. It is in this state that he published “The Raven” in the Evening Mirror journal. As his editorial duties ended due to the failing of the Broadway Journal, Poe’s wife also died, which led him to write the famed poem “Annabel Lee”.

Much about Poe’s death is a mystery. He died at the early age of 40 and was found in a stupor by a man who helped him to the hospital. Many reports say that he was not wearing his own clothes and that he was not drunk. Others **speculate** that he was showing signs of being affected by rabies. Still, other reports suggest that he had become delirious to do his drug use or even some sort of brain disease.

One aspect of Poe is certain. In his short literary lifetime, he changed American Romantic Literature. Much is documented about his sole invention of the American detective story and the short story.  He is also famed for his constant backing of “art for art’s sake”. His poems, critiques, writings, and short stories are not only remnants of American Literature at its finest, but also a detailing of one of the most passionately creative artists of all time.

Edgar Allan Poe is dead. This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it. The poet was known, personally or by reputation, in all this country; he had readers in England, and in several of the states of Continental Europe; but he had few or no friends; and the regrets for his death will be suggested principally by the consideration that in him literary art has lost one of its most brilliant but erratic stars.—*Rufus Griswold’s obituary for Edgar Allan Poe, taken from "Recoil of Fate," Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, http://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1921/quinnc20.htm, 2014.*

Use the passage on pages 1 and 2 to help you answer the questions below.

1. The word “latter” in paragraph 1 probably means…
2. A thing used for climbing
3. Unfortunate
4. Later
5. Amusing
6. A word that describes the life of Edgar Allan Poe *overall* would be
7. Hopeful
8. Troubled
9. Unsuccessful
10. Uneventful
11. According to the passage, Poe was
12. In the Army
13. A critic
14. A writer
15. All of the above
16. The word “speculate” in paragraph 6 probably means…
17. Make an educated guess
18. Invent
19. Publish
20. Report
21. All of the following might be the cause of Edgar Allan Poe’s death, EXCEPT:
22. Rabies
23. Drug Use
24. Brain Disease
25. Tuberculosis

What is Edgar Allan Poe’s greatest contribution to society? Write a 7-sentence paragraph to construct your answer.

Taken from *Memoir of the Author* by Rufus Griswold, on the death of Edgar Allan Poe

On Thursday, the fourth of October, he set out for New-York, to fulfill a literary engagement, and to prepare for his marriage. Arriving in Baltimore he gave his trunk to a porter, with directions to convey it to the cars which were to leave in an hour or two for Philadelphia, and went into a tavern to obtain some refreshment. Here he met acquaintances who invited him to drink; all his resolutions and duties were soon forgotten; in a few hours he was in such a state as is commonly induced only by long-continued intoxication; after a night of insanity and exposure, he was carried to a hospital; and there, on the evening of Sunday, the seventh of October, 1849, he died, at the age of thirty-eight years.

It is a melancholy history. No author of as much genius had ever in this country as much unhappiness; That Poe’s unhappiness was in an unusual degree the result of infirmities of nature, or of voluntary faults in conduct. A writer who evidently knew him well, and who comes before us in the “Southern Literary Messenger” as his defender, is “compelled to admit that the blemishes in his life were effects of character rather than of circumstances.” How this character might have been modified by a judicious education of all his faculties I leave for the decision of others, but it will be evident to those who read this biography that the unchecked freedom of his earlier years was as unwise as its result” were unfortunate.

It is contended that the higher intelligences, in the scrutiny to which they appeal, are not to be judged by the common laws; but I apprehend that this doctrine, as it is Likely to be understood, is entirely wrong. All men are amenable to the same principles, to the extent of the parallelism of these principles with their experience; and the line of duty becomes only more severe as it extends into the clearer atmosphere of truth and beauty which is the life of genius. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is a common and an honorable sentiment, but its proper application would lead to the suppression of the histories of half of the most conspicuous of mankind; in this case it is impossible on account of the notoriety of Mr. Poe’s faults; and it would be unjust to the living against whom his hands were always raised and who had no resort but in his outlawry from their sympathies. Moreover, his career is full of instruction and warning, and it has always been made a portion of the penalty of wrong that its anatomy should be displayed for the common study and advantage.

**Edgar Allan Poe**

**The (Still) Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe**

**Was the famous author killed from a beating? From carbon monoxide poisoning? From alcohol withdrawal? Here are the top nine theories.**

By [Natasha Geiling](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/author/natasha-del-toro/)

smithsonian.com   
October 7, 2014

It was raining in Baltimore on October 3, 1849, but that didn't stop Joseph W. Walker, a compositor for the *Baltimore Sun*, from heading out to [Gunner's Hall](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1998-10-29/entertainment/1998302106_1_poe-figgs-rufus-griswold" \t "_blank), a public house bustling with activity. It was Election Day, and Gunner's Hall served as a pop-up polling location for the 4th Ward polls. When Walker arrived at Gunner's Hall, he found a man, delirious and dressed in shabby second-hand clothes, lying in the gutter. The man was semi-conscious, and unable to move, but as Walker approached the him, he discovered something unexpected: the man was Edgar Allan Poe. Worried about the health of the addled poet, Walker stopped and asked Poe if he had any acquaintances in Baltimore that might be able to help him. Poe gave Walker the name of Joseph E. Snodgrass, a magazine editor with

Baltimore City, Oct. 3, 1849   
Dear Sir,

There is a gentleman, rather the worse for wear, at Ryan's 4th ward polls, who goes under the cognomen of Edgar A. Poe, and who appears in great distress, & he says he is acquainted with you, he is in need of immediate assistance.

Yours, in haste,   
JOS. W. WALKER   
To Dr. J.E. Snodgrass.

On September 27—almost a week earlier—Poe had left Richmond, Virginia bound for Philadelphia to edit a collection of poems for Mrs. St. Leon Loud, a minor figure in American poetry at the time. When Walker found Poe in delirious disarray outside of the polling place, it was the first anyone had heard or seen of the poet since his departure from Richmond. Poe never made it to Philadelphia to attend to his editing business. Nor did he ever make it back to New York, where he had been living, to escort his aunt back to Richmond for his impending wedding. Poe was never to leave Baltimore, where he launched his career in the early 19th- century, again—and in the four days between Walker finding Poe outside the public house and Poe's death on October 7, he never regained enough consciousness to explain how he had come to be found, in soiled clothes not his own, incoherent on the streets. Instead, Poe spent his final days wavering between fits of delirium, gripped by visual hallucinations. The night before his death, according to his attending physician Dr. John J. Moran, Poe repeatedly called out for "[Reynolds](http://www.eapoe.org/geninfo/poedeath.htm" \t "_blank)"—a figure who, to this day, remains a mystery.

Poe's death—shrouded in mystery—seems ripped directly from the pages of one of his own works. He had spent years crafting a careful image of a man inspired by adventure and fascinated with enigmas—a poet, a detective, an author, a world traveler who fought in the Greek War of Independence and was held prisoner in [Russia](http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/10/07/obituary-of-edgar-allan-poe/" \t "_blank). But though his death certificate listed the cause of death as phrenitis, or swelling of the brain, the mysterious circumstances surrounding his death have led many to speculate about the true cause of Poe's demise. "Maybe it’s fitting that since he invented the detective story," says Chris Semtner, curator of the [Poe Museum](http://www.poemuseum.org/" \t "_blank) in Richmond, Virginia, "he left us with a real-life mystery."

**1. Beating**

In 1867, one of the first theories to deviate from either phrenitis or alcohol was published by biographer E. Oakes Smith in her article "[Autobiographic Notes: Edgar Allan Poe](http://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1851/18670200.htm" \t "_blank)." "At the instigation of a woman, " Smith writes, "who considered herself injured by him, he was cruelly beaten, blow upon blow, by a ruffian who knew of no better mode of avenging supposed injuries. It is well known that a brain fever followed. . . ." Other accounts also mention "ruffians" who had beaten Poe senseless before his death. As Eugene Didier wrote in his 1872 article, "The Grave of Poe," that while in Baltimore, Poe ran into some friends from West Point, who prevailed upon him to join them for drinks. Poe, unable to handle liquor, became madly drunk after a single glass of champagne, after which he left his friends to wander the streets. In his drunken state, he "was robbed and beaten by ruffians, and left insensible in the street all night."

**2. Cooping**

Others believe that Poe fell victim to a practice known as [cooping](http://www.eapoe.org/geninfo/poedeath.htm" \t "_blank), a method of voter fraud practiced by gangs in the 19th century where an unsuspecting victim would be kidnapped, disguised and forced to vote for a specific candidate multiple times under multiple disguised identities. Voter fraud was extremely common in Baltimore around the mid 1800s, and the polling site where Walker found the disheveled Poe was a known place that coopers brought their victims. The fact that Poe was found delirious on election day, then, is no coincidence.

Over the years, the cooping theory has come to be one of the more widely accepted explanations for Poe's strange demeanor before his death. Before Prohibition, voters were [given alcohol after voting](http://blog.constitutioncenter.org/2012/11/booze-on-election-day-was-an-american-tradition/" \t "_blank) as a sort of reward; had Poe been forced to vote multiple times in a cooping scheme, that might explain his semi-conscious, ragged state.

Around the late 1870s, Poe's biographer J.H. Ingram received several letters that blamed Poe's death on a cooping scheme. A letter from William Hand Browne, a member of the faculty at Johns Hopkins, explains that "the general belief here is, that Poe was seized by one of these gangs, (his death happening just at election-time; an election for sheriff took place on Oct. 4th), 'cooped,' stupefied with liquor, dragged out and voted, and then turned adrift to die."

**3. Alcohol**

"A lot of the ideas that have come up over the years have centered around the fact that Poe couldn’t handle alcohol," says Semtner. "It has been documented that after a glass of wine he was staggering drunk. His sister had the same problem; it seems to be something hereditary."

Months before his death, Poe became a vocal member of the [temperance movement](http://www.eapoe.org/geninfo/poealchl.htm" \t "_blank), eschewing alcohol, which he'd [struggled with all his life](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/4944503/Edgar-Allen-Poe-wrote-letter-to-publisher-apologising-for-drunkenness.html). Biographer Susan Archer Talley Weiss recalls, in her biography "The Last Days of Edgar A. Poe," an event, toward the end of Poe's time in Richmond, that might be relevant to theorists that prefer a "death by drinking" demise for Poe. Poe had fallen ill in Richmond, and after making a somewhat miraculous recovery, was told by his attending physician that "another such attack would prove fatal." According to Weiss, Poe replied that "if people would not tempt him, he would not fall," suggesting that the first illness was brought on by a bout of drinking.

Those around Poe during his finals days seem convinced that the author did, indeed, fall into that temptation, drinking himself to death. As his close friend J. P. Kennedy wrote on October 10, 1949: "On Tuesday last Edgar A. Poe died in town here at the hospital from the effects of a debauch. . . . He fell in with some companion here who seduced him to the bottle, which it was said he had renounced some time ago. The consequence was fever, delirium, and madness, and in a few days a termination of his sad career in the hospital. Poor Poe! . . . A bright but unsteady light has been awfully quenched."

Though the theory that Poe's drinking lead to his death fails to explain his five-day disappearance, or his second-hand clothes on October 3, it was nonetheless a popular theory propagated by Snodgrass after Poe's death. Snodgrass, a member of the temperance movement, gave lectures across the country, blaming Poe's death on binge drinking. Modern science, however, has thrown a wrench into Snodgrasses talking points: samples of Poe's hair from after his death show low levels of lead, explains Semtner, which is an indication that Poe remained faithful to his vow of sobriety up until his demise.

**4. Carbon Monoxide Poisoning**

In 1999, public health researcher Albert Donnay argued that Poe's death was a result of [carbon monoxide poisoning](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1281520/" \t "_blank) from coal gas that was used for indoor lighting during the 19th century. Donnay took clippings of Poe's hair and tested them for certain [heavy metals](http://www.eapoe.org/geninfo/poethair.htm" \t "_blank) that would be able to reveal the presence of coal gas. The test was inconclusive, leading biographers and historians to [largely discredit](http://books.google.com/books?id=TcRqpD3q-e8C&pg=PA156&lpg=PA156&dq=donnay+carbon+monoxide+historians+edgar+allan+poe&source=bl&ots=LmAPyJixQW&sig=p9q-ZwnntTlLC6ecyeklDCv2MPs&hl=en&sa=X&ei=0eIyVOTtE5L5yQSnzYKADA&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAg" \l "v=onepage&q=donnay%20carbon%20monoxide%20historians%20edgar%20allan%20poe&f=false" \t "_blank) Donnay's theory.

**5. Heavy Metal Poisoning**

While Donnay's test didn't reveal levels of heavy metal consistent with carbon monoxide poisoning, the tests did reveal elevated levels of mercury in Poe's system months before his death. According to Semtner, Poe's mercury levels were most likely elevated as a result of a cholera epidemic he'd been exposed to in July of 1849, while in Philadelphia. Poe's doctor prescribed calomel, or mercury chloride. Mercury poisoning, Semtner says, could help explain some of Poe's hallucinations and delirium before his death. However, the levels of mercury found in Poe's hair, even at their highest, are still 30 times below the level consistent with mercury poisoning.

**6. Rabies**

In 1996, Dr. R. Michael Benitez was participating in a clinical pathologic conference where doctors are given patients, along with a list of symptoms, and instructed to diagnose and compare with other doctors as well as the written record. The symptoms of the anonymous patient E.P., "a writer from Richmond" were clear: E.P. had [succumbed to rabies](http://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/15/us/poe-s-death-is-rewritten-as-case-of-rabies-not-telltale-alcohol.html" \t "_blank). According to E.P.'s supervising physician, Dr. J.J. Moran, E.P. had been admitted to a hospital due to "lethargy and confusion." Once admitted, E.P.'s condition began a rapid downward spiral: shortly, the patient was exhibiting delirium, visual hallucinations, wide variations in pulse rate and rapid, shallow breathing. Within four days—the median length of survival after the onset of serious rabies symptoms—E.P. was dead.

E.P., Benitez soon found out, wasn't just any author from Richmond. It was Poe whose death the Maryland cardiologist had diagnosed as a clear case of rabies, a fairly common virus in the 19th century. Running counter to any prevailing theories at the time, Benitez's diagnosis ran in the September 1996 issue of the *[Maryland Medical Journal](http://umm.edu/news-and-events/news-releases/1996/edgar-allan-poe-mystery" \t "_blank)*. As Benitez pointed out in his article, without DNA evidence, it's impossible to say with 100 percent certainty that Poe succumbed to the rabies virus. There are a few kinks in the theory, including no evidence of hydrophobia (those afflicted with rabies develop a fear of water, Poe was reported to have been drinking water at the hospital until his death) nor any evidence of an animal bite (though some with rabies don't remember being bitten by an animal). Still, at the time of the article's publication, Jeff Jerome, curator of the Poe House Museum in Baltimore, agreed with Benitez's diagnosis. "This is the first time since Poe died that a medical person looked at Poe's death without any preconceived notions," Jerome [told the Chicago Tribune](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-10-11/features/9610110192_1_rufus-griswold-ep-dr-r-michael-benitez" \t "_blank) in October of 1996. "If he knew it was Edgar Allan Poe, he'd think, 'Oh yeah, drugs, alcohol,' and that would influence his decision. Dr. Benitez had no agenda."

**7. Brain Tumor**

One of the most recent theories about Poe's death suggests that the author succumbed to a brain tumor, which influenced his behavior before his death. When Poe died, he was buried, rather unceremoniously, in an unmarked grave in a Baltimore graveyard. Twenty-six years later, a statue was erected, honoring Poe, near the graveyard's entrance. Poe's coffin was dug up, and [his remains exhumed](http://www.eapoe.org/pstudies/ps1970/p1974204.htm" \t "_blank), in order to be moved to the new place of honor. But more than two decades of buried decay had not been kind to Poe's coffin—or the corpse within it—and the apparatus fell apart as workers tried to move it from one part of the graveyard to another. Little remained of Poe's body, but one worker did remark on a strange feature of Poe's skull: a mass rolling around inside. Newspapers of the day claimed that the clump was Poe's brain, shriveled yet intact after almost three decades in the ground.

We know, today, that the mass could not be Poe's brain, which is one of the first parts of the body to rot after death. But Matthew Pearl, an American author who wrote [a novel about Poe's death](http://www.amazon.com/Poe-Shadow-Matthew-Pearl-ebook/dp/B000GCFW6Y/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1412612504&sr=8-4&keywords=matthew+pearl" \t "_blank), was nonetheless intrigued by this clump. He contacted a forensic pathologist, who told him that while the clump couldn't be a brain, it could be a brain tumor, which can calcify after death into hard masses.

According to Semtner, Pearl isn't the only person to believe Poe suffered from a brain tumor: a New York physician once told Poe that he had a [lesion on his brain](http://www.eapoe.org/balt/poechh.htm" \t "_blank) that caused his adverse reactions to alcohol.

**8. Flu**

A far less sinister theory suggests that Poe merely succumbed to the flu—which might have turned into deadly pneumonia—on this deathbed. As Semtner explains, in the days leading up to Poe's departure from Richmond, the author visited a physician, complaining of illness. "His last night in town, he was very sick, and his [soon-to-be] wife noted that he had a weak pulse, a fever, and she didn’t think he should take the journey to Philadelphia," says Semtner. "He visited a doctor, and the doctor also told him not to travel, that he was too sick." According to newspaper reports from the time, it was raining in Baltimore when Poe was there—which Semtner thinks could explain why Poe was found in clothes not his own. "The cold and the rain exasperated the flu he already had," says Semtner, "and maybe that eventually lead to pneumonia. The high fever might account for his hallucinations and his confusion."

**9. Murder**

In his 2000 book [Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0312227329/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0312227329&linkCode=as2&tag=smithsonianco-20&linkId=S5CPOQMKP6VIGK2Q" \t "_blank), author John Evangelist Walsh presents yet another theory about Poe's death: that Poe was murdered by the brothers of his wealthy fiancée, Elmira Shelton. Using evidence from newspapers, letters and memoirs, Walsh argues that Poe actually made it to Philadelphia, where he was ambushed by Shelton's three brothers, who warned Poe against marrying their sister. Frightened by the experience, Poe disguised himself in new clothes (accounting for, in Walsh's mind, his second-hand clothing) and hid in Philadelphia for nearly a week, before heading back to Richmond to marry Shelton. Shelton's brothers intercepted Poe in Baltimore, Walsh postulates, beat him, and forced him to drink whiskey, which they knew would send Poe into a deathly sickness. Walsh's theory has gained little traction among Poe historians—or book reviewers; Edwin J. Barton, in a review for the journal American Literature, [called Walsh's story](https://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/american_literature/v073/73.2barton.pdf" \t "_blank) "only plausible, not wholly persuasive." "Midnight Dreary is interesting and entertaining," he concluded, "but its value to literary scholars is limited and oblique."

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For Semtner, however, none of the theories fully explain Poe's curious end. "I've never been completely convinced of any one theory, and I believe Poe's cause of death resulted from a combination of factors," he says. "His attending physician is our best source of evidence. If he recorded on the mortality schedule that Poe died of phrenitis, Poe was most likely suffering from encephalitis or meningitis, either of which might explain his symptoms."

Use the boxes below to record information about the different possible causes of Poe’s death from each of the 9 stations.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 |

Make your answer *clear.*

Based on all the information you have gathered about Edgar Allan Poe, write 7 sentence paragraphs to complete the following statements:

1. Edgar Allan Poe’s death was…
2. We can learn from Rufus Griswold that…
3. Edgar Allan Poe’s life was…
4. We can learn from Edgar Allan Poe’s fame that…

### THE TELL-TALE HEART

**by Edgar Allan Poe   
1843**

TRUE! --nervous --very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses --not destroyed --not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily --how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture --a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees --very gradually --I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded --with what caution --with what foresight --with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it --oh so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly --very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! would a madman have been so wise as this, And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously-oh, so cautiously --cautiously (for the hinges creaked) --I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights --every night just at midnight --but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I felt the extent of my own powers --of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back --but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers,) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out --"Who's there?"

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening; --just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief --oh, no! --it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself --"It is nothing but the wind in the chimney --it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel --although he neither saw nor heard --to feel the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little --a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it --you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily --until, at length a simple dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye.

It was open --wide, wide open --and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness --all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the senses? --now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! --do you mark me well I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me --the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once --once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye --not even his --could have detected any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash out --no stain of any kind --no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all --ha! ha!

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock --still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, --for what had I now to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbour during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled, --for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search --search well. I led them, at length, to his chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct: --It continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definitiveness --until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

No doubt I now grew very pale; --but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased --and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound --much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath --and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly --more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men --but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what could I do? I foamed --I raved --I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder --louder --louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! --no, no! They heard! --they suspected! --they knew! --they were making a mockery of my horror!-this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! and now --again! --hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!

"Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed! --tear up the planks! here, here! --It is the beating of his hideous heart!"

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statements** | **You Agree** | **You Disagree** | **Narrator Agrees** | **Narrator Disagrees** |
| People who are insane always know that they are insane. |  |  |  |  |
| Sane people sometimes imagine that they hear things. |  |  |  |  |
| If you commit a major crime, sooner or later you will be caught. |  |  |  |  |
| When you’ve done something wrong, it’s agony to wonder if you’ll be caught. |  |  |  |  |
| All people share the same fears (i.e., the same things frighten all people.) |  |  |  |  |

Post-Reading Questions

1. What is the conflict the narrator faces?
   1. He doesn’t like the old man
   2. He doesn’t like the old man’s eye
   3. The old man is a terrible enemy
   4. He is insane.
2. What is the climax of the story?
   1. The murder
   2. The confession
   3. The spying and plotting
   4. The sound of the beating heart
3. Why does the character confess?
   1. He doesn’t.
   2. He realizes the old man isn’t really dead.
   3. The police can hear the beating heart and are about to discover the body.
   4. His guilt over the crime makes him lose control.
4. The word *crevice*, as seen near the bottom of the second page, probably means…
   1. Giant opening
   2. Large gap
   3. Small crack
   4. A window
5. The word *gesticulations*, found near the end of the story, probably means
   1. Dance moves
   2. Gun shots
   3. High-pitched sound
   4. Hand gestures or motions

Discussion Questions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Discussion Question | Evidence-Based Response |
| What components of a scary story were present in this story? |  |
| How reliable is the narrator regarding his own sanity? | Claim:  Evidence: |
| How does Poe use images and phrases to create an atmosphere of horror? |  |
| Why does the killer confess? Does the heartbeat really tell the tale of murder? | Claim:  Evidence: |
| What do you think Edgar Allan Poe wants the reader to know about life at the end of this story? | Claim:  Evidence: |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Edgar Allan Poe  Test Review  Vocab. This part of the test will be taken without the use of notes.  Lyric Poem –  Mood –  Tone –  Sepulchre –  Covet –  Seraphs –  Dissever –  RHYME –  ALLITERATION –  RHYTHM –  REPETITION –  NARRATIVE POEM –  Short Story –    Poem –  Prose –  Macabre –    Foreshadowing - | Biography -    Romantic –    Cask –  Amontillado –  Jester –  Revenge –    Stanza –    Verse -    Hope –  Spanish Inquisition –    Pendulum –  Mad –  Anxiety –    Concealment –    Dismember –    Audacity –    Derision - |

Other Titles We Cover:

“Cask of Amontillado”

“Annabel Lee”

“The Pit and the Pendulum”

“The Oval Portrait”

\*For each work of Poe, our goal is to look past the obvious horror and try to connect the events of the text to the real things Poe experienced in life.

For each work:

Summarize the text in 20 words or less. Explain how it connects to a *specific event* in Poe’s life.

\*If unsure, aim to connect the story/poem to an emotion he may have felt as a result of the events in his life