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Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Best of Poe

by Edgar Allan Poe

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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 **Prestwick House**

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938
www.prestwickhouse.com
800.932.4593

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The Best of Poe

All page references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics edition of *The Best of Poe: The Tell-Tale Heart, The Raven, The Cask of Amontillado, and 30 Others*, copyright 2006.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, students will be able to:

1. recognize and describe various elements of Gothic horror and detective fiction.
2. define the following literary elements and point out examples of each: allusion, atmosphere, imagery, irony, metaphor, narrator, personification, setting, simile, theme, and tone.
3. understand and identify the characteristics that define empiricism and transcendentalism.
4. apply logic and systematic deduction to solve a puzzle.
5. understand how satire is used to ridicule folly, vice, and stupidity.
6. distinguish between the author and the narrator of a story.
7. identify the following sound devices:
 - alliteration
 - assonance
 - internal rhyme
 - onomatopoeia
 - repetition
 - rhyme
8. recognize an allegory.
9. define the vocabulary words listed in the study guide.
10. distinguish between a reliable and an unreliable narrator.
11. understand the fundamentals of ciphered code.
12. analyze a poem's meter and rhyme scheme.
13. appreciate the potential psychological influences of superstitious beliefs.

The Best of Poe

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the various elements of Gothic literature that arise in *The Fall of the House of Usher*.
2. Explain the metaphysical relationship between Roderick and Madeline Usher.
3. Define the fundamental characteristics of detective fiction as portrayed in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.
4. Explain how *Never Bet the Devil Your Head* is a satirical response to critics who claim that Poe's work contains no moral lessons.
5. What is significant about the design and layout of the seven rooms in *The Masque of the Red Death*?
6. Explain the double meaning of the title, *The Masque of the Red Death*.
7. In *The Pit and the Pendulum*, how is the endurance of the human spirit celebrated?
8. How does the narrator's sensory perception increase the element of terror in *The Pit and the Pendulum*?
9. In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, what is the "Evil Eye"? How does the superstitious belief in the "Evil Eye" relate to the story?
10. In what way is the narrator established as unreliable in *The Tell-Tale Heart*?
11. In *The Gold-Bug*, what coincidences play a role in discovering the treasure?
12. Cite the similarities between *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*.
13. How does Poe employ supernatural or unusual events to create suspense in *The Black Cat*?
14. What characteristics indicate that *A Tale of the Ragged Mountains* is a psychological story instead of a supernatural thriller?
15. In what ways does *The Premature Burial* differ from other short stories by Poe?
16. How does Poe utilize sensory images to enhance *The Premature Burial*?
17. How does the significance of the letter change throughout *The Purloined Letter*?

1. The story begins with a quote by Don Thomas de las Torres, which essentially states that “provided the morals of an author are pure personally, it signifies nothing what are the morals of his books.” Does the narrator agree or disagree with this perspective?

2. The narrator addresses the issue of morals in fiction, stating that all works of fiction, despite the author’s intentions, contain a moral lesson. He writes, “A novelist, for example, need have no care of his moral. It is there—that is to say, it is somewhere—and the moral and the critics can take care of themselves.” (Pg. 56) Why does Poe begin the story with this message?

3. Explain the following comment that the narrator makes about Toby Dammit: “He was a sad dog, it is true, and a dog’s death it was that he died.” (Pg. 56)

4. What explanation is given for why a left-handed person should not flog a child?

5. Why is the description of Dammit’s childhood development humorous?

1. According to the narrator, why is it acceptable to write about horrible incidents, and why?

2. Explain the following statement: “The true wretchedness, indeed—the ultimate woe—is particular, not diffuse.” (Pg. 133)

3. The narrator writes, “That the ghastly extremes of agony are endured by man the unit, and never by man the mass—for this let us thank a merciful God!” (Pg. 133) Why is this statement ironic?

4. What does the narrator identify as the worst form of personal suffering?

5. The narrator describes an incident involving a deceased woman from Baltimore. What occurs three years after her death, and what does the family discern about the woman’s situation?

6. Why does Mademoiselle Victorine Lafourcade marry Monsieur Renelle instead of Julien Bossuet? How is her marriage to Monsieur Renelle?

The Cask of Amontillado

Vocabulary

absconded – left quickly; disappeared
azure – the color blue
circumscribing – encircling; constricting
ejaculated – exclaimed
Eld – [*archaic*] old age
fettered – chained
flagon – a glass bottle for holding wine before serving it
flambeaux – torches
gait – a manner of walking
hearken – to listen
immolation – a sacrifice
impunity – with no regard; exemption
leer – a sideways glance; sneer
motley – a clown or jester’s costume; varied (in color or design)
nitre – potassium nitrate, a compound that causes oxidation; an ingredient in gunpowder
palazzo – a mansion
puncheons – large casks
rapier – a type of small sword
redresser – an avenger
rheum – a thick watery discharge from the eyes
roquelaire – a knee-length cloak
surmounted – rested on top
unredressed – not avenged
virtuoso – a person skilled or knowledgeable in a specific subject

1. The story begins, “The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge.” (Pg. 161) What does the narrator’s comment suggest about his reliability?

2. What wrong has Fortunato done to, Montresor that warrants death? What does this answer suggest about Montresor?

5. Line 16 reads, “No more—no more—no more—.” When read aloud, what does this line sound like or bring to mind?

6. Explain the meaning of the following passage: “Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree/Or the stricken eagle soar!” (lines 19 – 20)

7. What words suggest that the narrator’s lover has died?
