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Response Journal

Reflections: A Student Response Journal



The Best of Poe:
The Tell-Tale Heart, The Raven,
The Cask of Amontillado and 30 Others
Edgar Allan Poe



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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Pre-Reading

1. Edgar Allan Poe's young wife Virginia died of tuberculosis in 1847, at the age of twenty-five. Poe himself died two years later on October 7, 1849. While the cause of Poe's death has never been determined, the certifying physician noted congestion of the brain as the cause of death; many people believe he died of rabies. Today, we have life saving vaccines and treatments for both conditions. In fact, today Poe could even take a pill to aid him in his infamous battle against alcoholism. Advances in medical science, however, are just a small part of the changes that have taken place since 1849. Moreover, not all the changes have such positive results.

Use the Internet or other appropriate reference material to research what life was like in the nineteenth century. Then, imagine you have been given the task of bringing Poe up to date. Compose a list of at least fifteen of the most important changes, good and bad, that he would encounter.

2. On October 3, 1849, a passer-by discovered Poe lying unconscious outside of a saloon on Lombard Street in Baltimore, Maryland. He died in Washington College Hospital four days later, after going in and out of a coma. Mystery still shrouds the circumstances of his death. Had he consumed too much alcohol? Though he had a history of heavy drinking, his medical records indicate that he hadn't consumed alcohol for six months prior to his death. He did, however, propose marriage to his childhood sweetheart earlier in the day. Did he perhaps fall off the wagon in celebration?

Did he pass out from an opium overdose? He was known to use and abuse opiates, and he even incorporated the results of his usage into his writing.

Did he suffer from rabies? Doctors say some of the symptoms on his hospital record match the rabies diagnosis, and that rabies can lie dormant in the system for up to a year. He did have pets, after all, and pets were not vaccinated back then.

The Best of Poe

Mental health experts believe that some sixty-percent of hypochondriacs also suffer from mental illnesses such as severe depression, anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, or panic disorder. Today hypochondria is often worsened by media and Internet bombardment. In fact, people who comb the Internet looking for diseases to worry about are called cyberchondriacs.

Imagine you are an advice columnist, and a cyberchondriac has written to you for help. The letter reads:

I don't know what's wrong with me. I just don't feel right. I put my symptoms into Google but cannot find any disease that fits. My head aches, I feel nauseas everyday about 2 pm, my throat is itchy, and I feel like I have a fever.

Signed,
Confused

Write a reply to the person.

7. After Madeline dies of her mysterious ailment, Roderick and his dearest childhood friend, the unnamed narrator, place her in a tomb beneath the house. The arrangement is meant to be a temporary one to prevent the doctors from using her body for research. After they inter Madeline, Roderick is anxious and agitated. He suffers such stress that he becomes hysterical when he sees floating lights outside the window. His friend reassures him that it's just some form of natural gas, and then he reads him a story to soothe his nerves.

The death of a loved one, illness, money problems, school or job, and difficult relationships all cause stress. In high stress situations, what do you do to calm yourself? Write a paragraph describing some stress that you encountered and how you dealt with it.

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Rewrite the ending of “*The Tell-Tale Heart*” so that the narrator does not reveal anything to the police. Try to write between one-half and a full page.

“The Gold-Bug”

27. In “*The Gold-Bug*,” Legrand regains his fortune through a series of fortunate coincidences. For example, he finds the gold bug and the piece of parchment, which turns out to be a treasure map, near each other. Later, he coincidentally uses the parchment to draw the gold bug for the narrator. Then, the big dog jumps on the narrator’s lap so that the fire heats the parchment revealing the secret treasure map.

What is your opinion of these coincidences? Explain your opinion to someone else who has read the story.

28. Throughout the story, the narrator misjudges Legrand. With little information about why Legrand is behaving in a questionable manner at any given time, he thinks him mentally ill and unstable. Legrand turns out to be brilliant, however, restoring his family fortune and rewarding the narrator, as well.

Write a kids’ bedtime story in which you use animals to convey the message that you should not judge someone based on appearance.

29. Legrand is a lot like Poe, in that they are both down on their luck at various times. They are both intelligent and underestimated. They both enjoy a good puzzle, especially one involving decoding messages.

In 1839, Poe issued a challenge to the readers of *Alexander’s Weekly Messenger*, inviting them to create a substitution cipher, a message written in an alphabet of symbols. He wrote, “For example, in place of A put % or any other arbitrary character—in place of B, a *, etc., etc. Let an entire alphabet be made in this manner, and then let this alphabet be used in any piece of writing...Let this be put to the test.”

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Name	Main Characteristic or Duty
Zues	
Hercules	
Poseidon	
Mars	
Apollo	
Bacchus	
Hera	
Cupid	
Prometheus	
Aphrodite	
Athena	
