

Before Reading

The Raven



Video link at
thinkcentral.com

Poem by Edgar Allan Poe

Incident in a Rose Garden

Poem by Donald Justice

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML9-144

Why are we fascinated by the **UNKNOWN**?

COMMON CORE

RL 4 Determine the connotative meaning of words as they are used in a text; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. **RL 5** Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text create mystery and surprise. **RL 10** Read and comprehend poetry.

Have you ever skimmed the strange headlines of a tabloid newspaper when standing in line at the supermarket? Do you channel-surf for television shows about strange phenomena? Our fascination with weird or unexplained events makes us part of a long tradition of writers and readers who enjoy speculating on the unknown or the unexplainable. The writers of the two poems you are about to read relied on that universal fascination when they introduced us to two strange, and perhaps imaginary, visitors.

DISCUSS With a partner, share the story of a movie, television show, or urban legend that you find fascinating or unbelievable.



Meet the Authors

● TEXT ANALYSIS: NARRATIVE POETRY

Like fiction, a **narrative poem** contains the elements of plot, conflict, character, and setting that combine to create a story. Because of the nature of poetry, these elements are often condensed into images and compact descriptions. For example, notice that this line contains information about setting, plot, and character:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary

In each of the following narrative poems, the **speaker**, or voice that talks to the reader, is also the main character in the story. As you read, note what events each speaker describes and how these create a compelling story in verse form.

● READING SKILL: READING POETRY

When you read a narrative poem, certain reading strategies will help you understand the poem's story and meaning.

- First, read the poem silently to grasp the basic story line.
- Look for instances of **irony** with which the poet may use to add extra levels of depth and creativity to the poem.
- Then read the poem aloud several times, and listen to how it sounds. Pay attention to sound devices, such as **rhyme**, **rhythm**, and **repetition**. Does the poem include **alliteration**, the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words? How do these sound devices add to the effect of the poem? (To review the definitions of these sound-device terms, see the **Glossary of Literary and Nonfiction Terms**, page R102.)
- Look for clues that reveal something about the **speaker**. What does the speaker feel about the poem's characters and events?

As you read each poem, record the most striking examples of sound devices in a chart similar to the following:

| Sound Device | "The Raven" | "Incident in a Rose Garden" |
|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| alliteration | "nodded, nearly napping" | |



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Edgar Allan Poe

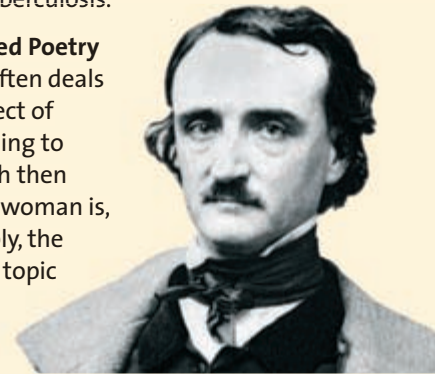
1809–1849

A Life of Tragedy

One of America's literary giants, Edgar Allan Poe has fascinated generations of readers with his haunting poetry and tales of horror. (See "The Cask of Amontillado" on page 370.) Poe suffered many tragic losses in his short life. He was orphaned at the age of 2 and taken in by foster parents, but never formally adopted. Poe later quarreled bitterly with his foster father. At the age of 27, Poe married a 13-year-old cousin, Virginia Clemm. She died about ten years later, after an agonizing battle with tuberculosis.

Death-Haunted Poetry

Poe's poetry often deals with the subject of death. According to Poe, the "death then of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world."



Donald Justice

1925–2004

From Music to Poetry

Donald Justice originally intended to become a composer and studied for a degree in music before deciding to become a writer. He then earned a doctorate in creative writing, participating in the Iowa Writers' Workshop. A Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Justice taught English at a number of universities.



Authors Online



Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML9-145

The RAVEN

Edgar Allan Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
5 “Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—
Only this and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow
10 From my books surcease of sorrow¹—sorrow for the lost Lenore—
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Nameless *here* forevermore. **A**

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
15 So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
“Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—
That it is and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
20 “Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you”—here I opened wide the door;—
Darkness there and nothing more.

Analyze Visuals ▶

What **mood** is conveyed by the style of the drawing?

A NARRATIVE POETRY

With what **internal conflict** does the speaker struggle?

1. **from my books surcease of sorrow**: from reading, an end to sorrow.



25 Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, “Lenore!”
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word “Lenore!”
30 Merely this and nothing more. **B**

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—
35 Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—
’Tis the wind and nothing more!”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.²
Not the least obeisance made he;³ not a minute stopped or stayed he;
40 But, with mien of lord or lady,⁴ perched above my chamber door—
Perched upon a bust of Pallas⁵ just above my chamber door—
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling⁶ my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance⁷ it wore,
45 “Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven,⁸
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian⁹ shore!”
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.” **C**

Much I marveled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
50 Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as “Nevermore.”

B READING POETRY

Reread lines 25–30.
Identify examples of **alliteration**, the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words. Notice how often this **sound device** occurs in this narrative poem. What is the effect?

C NARRATIVE POETRY

What can you conclude about the **speaker** from the way he reacts to the raven’s entrance?

2. **saintly days of yore**: sacred days of the past.

3. **not the least obeisance** (ō-bā’sēns) **made he**: he did not bow or make any other gesture of respect.

4. **with mien of lord or lady**: with the appearance of a noble person.

5. **bust of Pallas**: statue of the head and shoulders of Athena, Greek goddess of war and wisdom.

6. **this ebony bird beguiling** (bī-gī’līng): this black bird that is charming or delighting.

7. **grave and stern decorum . . . countenance** (koun’tē-nēns): serious and dignified expression on the face.

8. **art sure no craven**: are surely not cowardly.

9. **Plutonian**: having to do with Pluto, Roman god of the dead and ruler of the underworld.

55 But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—
Till I scarcely more than muttered, “Other friends have flown before—
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.”
60 Then the bird said, “Nevermore.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster **D**
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—
65 Till the dirges of his Hope¹⁰ that melancholy burden bore
Of ‘Never—nevermore.’”

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and bust and door;
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
70 Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore
Meant in croaking, “Nevermore.”

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom’s core;
75 This and more I sat divining,¹¹ with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion’s velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o’er,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o’er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
80 Swung by Seraphim¹² whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
“Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee
Respite—respite and nepenthe¹³ from thy memories of Lenore;
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe¹⁴ and forget this lost Lenore!”
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

D READING POETRY

Reread line 63. Notice the **internal rhyme**—similar or identical sounds within a line—of the words *master* and *disaster*. Find examples of internal rhyme in other stanzas, and notice how they help emphasize certain words.

COMMON CORE RL.4

Language Coach

Denotation/Connotation Many words have positive or negative emotional associations, or **connotations**. Reread line 74. Does the word *fiery* have a positive or negative connotation?

10. **dirges** (dūr'jĭz) **of his Hope**: funeral hymns mourning the loss of hope.

11. **divining** (dĭ-vī'nĭng): guessing or speculating.

12. **censer swung by Seraphim** (sĕr'ĕ-fĭm): container of burning incense swung by angels of the highest rank.

13. **he hath sent thee respite** (rĕs'pĭt) . . . **nepenthe** (nĭ-pĕn'thĕ): God has sent you relief and forgetfulness of sorrow.

14. **quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe**: drink this beverage that eases pain.



Red Passion (1996), Jim Dine. Cardboard relief intaglio. Image size 33 1/8" × 59". Paper size 39 1/2" × 63 7/8". Published by Pace Editions, Inc. Edition of 12. © 2007 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

85 “Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—
 Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed¹⁵ thee here ashore,
 Desolate yet all undaunted,¹⁶ on this desert land enchanted—
 On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—
 Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?¹⁷—tell me—tell me, I implore!” E
 90 Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

E READING POETRY
 What does the **repetition** in lines 88–89 help the poet achieve?

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!
 By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—
 Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,¹⁸
 It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
 95 Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.”
 Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!” I shrieked, upstarting—
 “Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!
 Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
 100 Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!
 Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”
 Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
 On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
 105 And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,
 And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
 And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
 Shall be lifted—nevermore! F

F NARRATIVE POETRY
 Think about whether the speaker’s **conflict** is resolved at the end of the poem. What can you **infer** about his future?

15. **whether Tempter sent . . . tempest tossed**: whether the devil sent or a violent storm carried.

16. **desolate yet all undaunted**: alone and yet unafraid.

17. **balm in Gilead** (gīl’ē-əd): relief from suffering.

18. **Aidenn** (ād’n): heaven.

Incident *in a* Rose Garden

DONALD JUSTICE



The Back of a Man with a Rose, René Magritte.
Private Collection Bloch, Santa Monica, CA. © 2007
C. Herscovici, Brussels/Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York. Photo © Superstock, Inc.

The gardener came running,
An old man, out of breath.
Fear had given him legs.

Sir, I encountered Death

5 *Just now among the roses.*

Thin as a scythe he stood there.

I knew him by his pictures.

He had his black coat on,

Black gloves, a broad black hat.

10 *I think he would have spoken,*

Seeing his mouth stood open.

Big it was, with white teeth.

As soon as he beckoned, I ran.

I ran until I found you.

15 *Sir, I am quitting my job.*

I want to see my sons

Once more before I die.

I want to see California. G

We shook hands; he was off.

G NARRATIVE POETRY

In lines 4–18, the gardener (whose words are italicized) describes Death as a **character**. What do these lines suggest the **conflict** of this poem will be?

20 And there stood Death in the garden,
 Dressed like a Spanish waiter.
 He had the air of someone
 Who because he likes arriving
 At all appointments early
 25 Learns to think himself patient.
 I watched him pinch one bloom off
 And hold it to his nose—
 A connoisseur of roses—
 One bloom and then another. **H**

30 They strewed the earth around him.
*Sir, you must be that stranger
 Who threatened my gardener.
 This is my property, sir.
 I welcome only friends here.*

35 Death grinned, and his eyes lit up
 With the pale glow of those lanterns
 That workmen carry sometimes
 To light their way through the dusk.
 Now with great care he slid
 40 The glove from his right hand
 And held that out in greeting,
 A little cage of bone.
*Sir, I knew your father,
 And we were friends at the end.
 45 As for your gardener,
 I did not threaten him.
 Old men mistake my gestures.
 I only meant to ask him
 To show me to his master.*

50 *I take it you are he?* **I**

H READING POETRY

Read aloud lines 26–29, and note the **rhythm** created by the words. What effect does this add to the image presented?

COMMON CORE RL.5

I READING POETRY

For most readers, lines 48–50 reveal a **surprise** ending. The poet uses **irony**, a difference between what the reader expects and what actually occurs. In this case, the reader's understanding that Death has come for the gardener is overturned when it is revealed that it is the narrator himself who is Death's victim. What details in the poem contribute to creating this ironic effect?

for Mark Strand

Comprehension

1. **Recall** What is the **setting** of each poem?
2. **Recall** In “The Raven,” what loss is the speaker trying to recover from?
3. **Recall** In “Incident in a Rose Garden,” for whom has Death really come?
4. **Clarify** What happens at the end of each poem?



RL 4 Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. **RL 5** Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text create mystery and surprise. **RL 10** Read and comprehend poetry.

Text Analysis

5. **Analyze** Reread lines 7–12 of “The Raven.” The **speaker** has tried to forget his sadness and loss. What is his mental state at the end of the poem? Do you think the raven is real or just a figment of his imagination? Support your views with details from the poem.
6. **Identify Irony** Explain the **ironies**, or unexpected twists, in “Incident in a Rose Garden.”
7. **Interpret Narrative Poetry** Use a chart to identify the narrative elements found in these poems. In each poem, which element plays the largest role? Support your answer.

| <i>Narrative Element</i> | <i>“The Raven”</i> | <i>“Incident in a Rose Garden”</i> |
|--|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Characters</i> | | |
| <i>Setting</i> | | |
| <i>Conflict</i> | | |
| <i>Resolution</i> <i>(How does it end?)</i> | | |

8. **Reading Poetry** Review the chart you filled in as you read the poems. Which poet depends more heavily on **sound devices** to help convey mood and meaning? Cite evidence.

Text Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations** With the publication of “The Raven” in 1845, Poe became famous overnight. More than 160 years later, the poem is still considered a classic. What accounts for its continued appeal? Be specific in your answer.

Why are we fascinated by the UNKNOWN?

What is it about unexplained events or occurrences that people find intriguing?