

PRIMARY POE: POE'S CHILDHOOD



Grade: 4th-12th

VSOLS: VS, USI, USII, VUS

THE POE MUSEUM

Directions: Learn about Edgar Allan Poe's upbringing in Richmond, Virginia through the objects in the Poe Museum's collection. First, identify what each source is by reading the object's info. Next, use the Primary Source Worksheet to analyze each source. Finally, answer the guiding questions under each primary source to interpret how the source relates to Poe's childhood in Richmond.

Introduction to Poe's Childhood in Richmond:

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19th, 1809, to traveling actors, David and Eliza Poe. When Poe was just a baby, David left the family leaving young Eliza to care for her three children. Two years later, Eliza moved her family to Richmond, Virginia to perform at the Richmond Theater. That winter, Eliza contracted tuberculosis, a respiratory disease, and passed away. Poe and his siblings, who were now orphans, were taken in by three separate families. Poe was taken in by the Allan family (hence the Allan in Edgar Allan Poe) who took him in as their foster child. Poe had a wealthy upbringing in Richmond, but also faced constant isolation from his foster father, John Allan. Poe grew up in Richmond for most of his childhood (he spent five years in London) until he attended college at the University of Virginia.



THE POE MUSEUM

BURNING OF THE RICHMOND THEATER

POE MUSEUM COLLECTION 376



Date: December 26th, 1811

Object Info: Edgar Allan Poe's mother, Eliza Poe, gave her last performance in this theater before her death on December 8, 1811. The theater burned 18 days later on December 26th during a well-attended performance. 72 people, including Virginia's governor, lost their lives. The burning of the Richmond Theater was the largest national tragedy at this time. After this tragedy, many actors were blamed and acting itself was banned in Richmond with a \$6.66 fine to anyone who was caught acting. Two years after the tragic fire, Monumental Church was built on the site of the Richmond Theater. Poe and his foster parents, the Allans, would attend church at Monumental Church in pew 80.

Guiding Questions:

- How has the public perception of acting changed from Poe's time to today?
- What does this object show us about life in Richmond, Virginia during Poe's upbringing?

THE POE MUSEUM

PORTRAIT OF JOHN ALLAN

POE MUSEUM COLLECTION 86.10



Date: 1804

Object Info: John Allan was Edgar Allan Poe's foster father. His wife, Frances Valentine Allan, took in the orphaned Poe after his mother, Eliza, had passed away. As Poe grew older, his relationship with Allan crumbled. The two often fought, leading Allan to never fully adopt Edgar. When Poe went off to attend college, Allan only paid for one third of Poe's tuition.

Guiding Questions:

- What image do you think Allan is attempting to portray in his portrait? What details do you notice?

- What does this portrait say about Allan's wealth?

THE POE MUSEUM

POE'S BED

POE MUSEUM COLLECTION 79.47.1



Date: Early 1800's

Object Info: Edgar Allan Poe's childhood bed and quilt.

Guiding Questions:

- How is this bed similar or different to your bed/beds we see today?
- How do you think this bed was constructed/crafted? Do you think beds are made in the same way today?

THE POE MUSEUM

IRONS

POE MUSEUM COLLECTION 2020.10.1.A-B



Date: Early 1800's

Object Info: These irons belonged to John and Francis Allan, Poe's foster parents, at their home Moldavia. Poe lived at Moldavia with Francis, John, his aunt Nancy, Judith—an enslaved woman, along with 12 other enslaved individuals.

Guiding Questions:

- Who in the Allan home would have used this object? Would anyone use this object or only certain people?
- What can this object tell us about domestic labor in urban 19th century Richmond?
- How does object show the change of technology over the past 150 years?

THE POE MUSEUM

GLASSWARE FROM THE ALLAN HOME

POE MUSEUM COLLECTION 2021.1.5.A



Date: 1830

Object Info: Edgar Allan Poe's foster father John Allan was fond of beautiful glassware and had a significant collection. This set, which includes a decanter and seven drinking glasses, are all monogrammed with the letter "A" for Allan.

Guiding Questions:

- What does this object tell us about the wealth of the Allans?
- How does Allan's wealth compare to Poe's wealth as an adult?

THE POE MUSEUM

SEALING WAX LAMP

POE MUSEUM COLLECTION 2020.10.2



Date: Early 1800's

Object Info: This wax sealing lamp is from Poe's childhood home, Moldavia. After writing a letter, a stick of sealing wax (seen on the right-hand side) would be put in the lamp where it would be melted then dropped on the letter to seal it. Sometimes the wax would be stamped with a decorative seal.

Guiding Questions:

- What does this object show us about the time and effort of writing and publishing poetry during Poe's lifetime?

THE POE MUSEUM

DRAWING OF ELMIRA ROYSTER

POE MUSEUM COLLECTION 67.



Date: ~1826

Object Info: This is a copy of a portrait that Edgar Allan Poe did of Elmira Royster. Elmira grew up in Richmond and met Poe when they were young. Poe and Elmira secretly got engaged before he attended college at the University of Virginia. Unfortunately, her father, James Royster, did not approve of Poe and hid all the letters he sent to Elmira. Elmira believed Poe forgot about her and went on to marry another man, leaving Poe heartbroken.

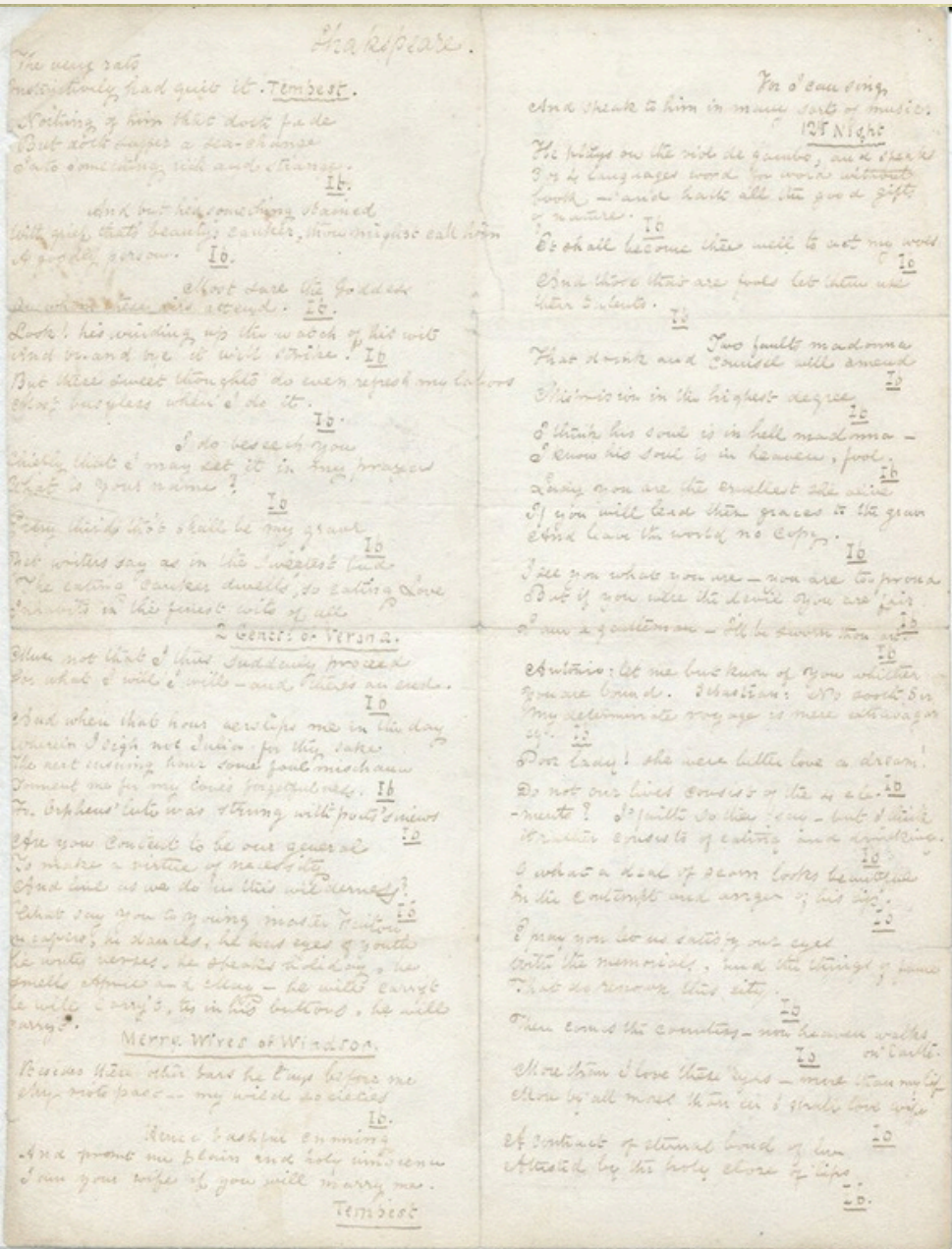
Guiding Questions:

- What does this drawing by Poe show us about his relationship with Elmira?
- How do you think the tragic ending of their relationship affected Poe's literature?

THE POE MUSEUM

POE'S NOTES ON SHAKESPEARE

POE MUSEUM COLLECTION 1029



Date: 1829

Object Info: This document contains notes that Poe took on several of William Shakespeare's works.

Guiding Questions:

- How does Poe's education compare to education today?
- What does this document tell us about Poe's influences on his writing?

THE POE MUSEUM

“ALONE” BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

Alone

*From childhood's hour I have not been
As others were—I have not seen
As others saw—I could not bring
My passions from a common spring—
From the same source I have not taken
My sorrow—I could not awaken
My heart to joy at the same tone—
And all I lov'd—I lov'd alone—
Then—in my childhood—in the dawn
Of a most stormy life—was drawn
From ev'ry depth of good and ill
The mystery which binds me still—
From the torrent, or the fountain—
From the red cliff of the mountain—
From the sun that 'round me roll'd
In its autumn tint of gold—
From the lightning in the sky
As it pass'd me flying by—
From the thunder, and the storm—
And the cloud that took the form
(When the rest of Heaven was blue)
Of a demon in my view—*

Date: 1829

Object Info: “Alone” was one of Poe’s earliest poems he wrote. It was published around the time his foster mother, Frances, had passed away. Poe, who was stationed at Fort Monroe at the time, was a day late for her funeral.

Guiding Questions:

- How does Poe describe his own childhood experience in “Alone?”
- What specific events in Poe’s childhood may he be referring to in this poem?

THE MUSEUM

PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHEET

ANALYZE AND IDENTIFY

- What is this source? Describe it. What color is it? Is it big or small? Have you seen an object like this before?
- When and where was it made?
- Why was it created?
- Who created it? Are there multiple people?
- Can anyone use this source? Or can only people of a certain gender, class, race, job etc. use this source?
- How was it made? What is it made of?
- Is this source sentimental to someone?
- Does this source have any text? If so, what does it say?

EVALUATE

- Is this source truthful and reliable?
- What is this source not telling us? Does further research need to be done?

INTERPRET

Context: What does this object show about larger historical events/trends at the time?

Cause and Effect: What event(s) led to this source being created? What bigger, historical event(s) happened when this source was used/created?

Compare and Contrast: What is similar about this source to another source? What is different?

Continuity: Is this source still used today? If so, how has it stayed the same? How has it changed? If not, why is it no longer used today?

CONCLUSION

Summarize your findings to draw historical conclusions about the past. Be sure to answer the guiding questions above in your answer. What information do you still need? What other primary sources would be helpful to look at?