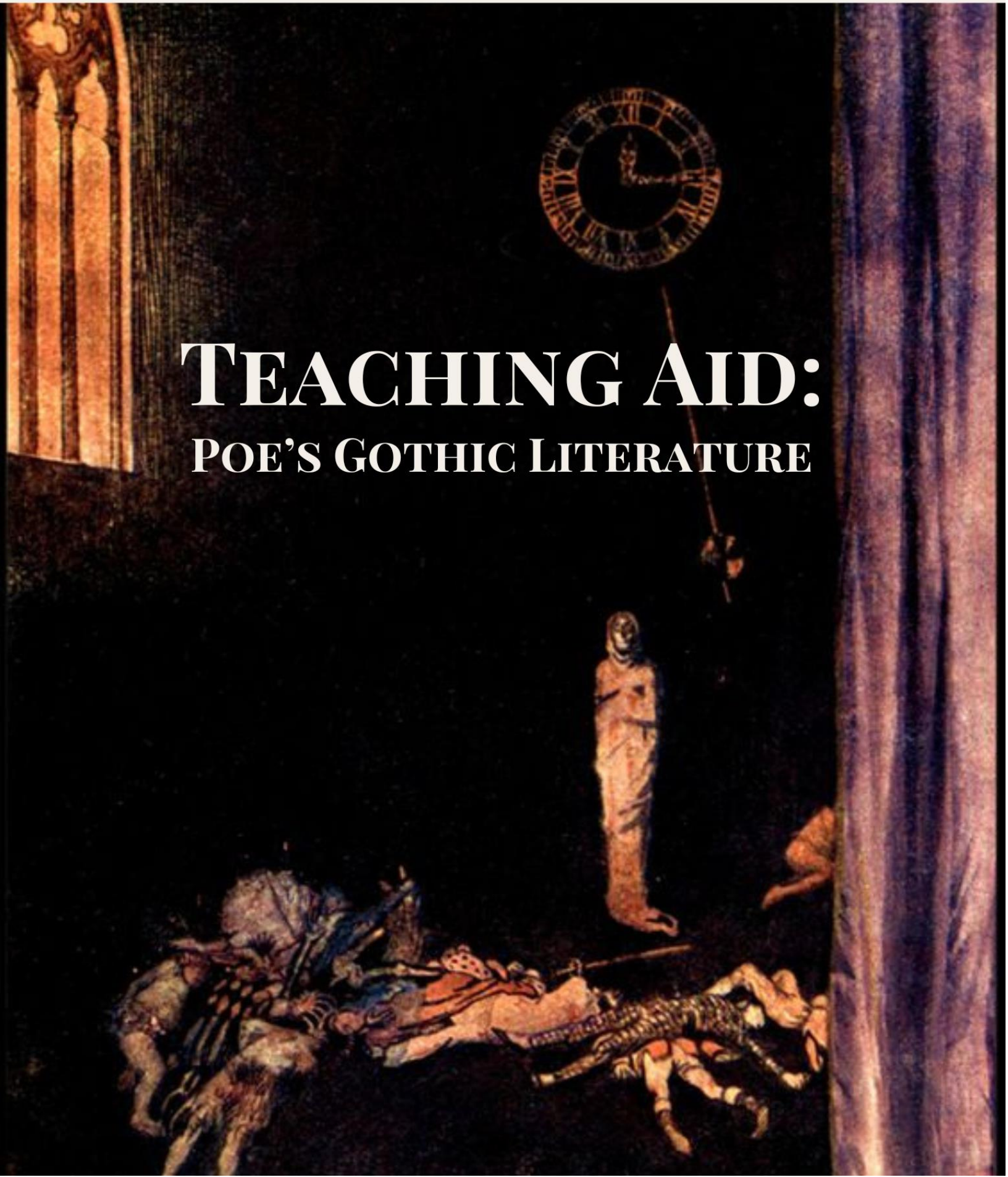
THE POE MUSEUM



TEACHING AID:

POE'S GOTHIC LITERATURE

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This teaching aid highlights literally skills best utilized with Poe's gothic literature (Tell-Tale Heart, Cask of Amontillado, The Fall of the House of Usher, Masque of the Red Death, and The Raven) and provides primary sources, paired literature/media, historical context, programs, and activities/assessments to pair with these works.

"The Tell-Tale Heart"

Literary Skills & Devices

- **Unreliable narrator**
    - "I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not"

      - Wayne C. Booth, who coined the term "Unreliable Narrator" in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*

    - Types of Unreliable Narrators: Mental Illness, Villains, Memory Loss
- **Point of view**
- **Repetition**

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.

Paired Short Story

- “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
- “The Birthmark” by Nathaniel Hawthorne
- “The Horla” by Guy de Maupassant

Paired Media

- The Sixth Sense
- “The Tell-Tale Heart” Narrated by James Mason
- PoeMovies adaption of “The Tell-Tale Heart”

Historical Context

Poe and Victorian True Crime

The Real-Life Murder That Inspired “The Tell-Tale Heart”

Poe Museum Primary Sources

The Tragic Almanack (1842)

First Printing of “The Tell-Tale Heart”

Poe’s Pocket watch

Poe Museum Educational Programs

A Narrator on Trial

“The Tell-Tale Heart” Guided Reading

Essay Prompts and Activities

Textual-Based Questions

- (If introducing the story to students) Read the first paragraph of the story. Write down three predictions about what the story will be about based on the title as well as the diction and tone used by the narrator in this first paragraph. Discuss the literary clues in the text that led to the students’ predictions. Discuss why this passage is a good example of foreshadowing. Students will explain how the passage sets the tone and mood of the story.

- How does Poe use repetition in "The Tell-Tale Heart" to indicate to the reader that the narrator is unreliable? How does the narrator use repetition to convince the reader that they are reliable?
- At what point does the narrator lose control of the story?

Contextual Questions

- How does the "Tell-Tale Heart" reflect the state of crime in the 19th century?

Activities

- Read the "Tell-Tale Heart" and make a chart with two headings: Reliable and Unreliable. Write pieces of evidence under each side that support each argument. of whether the narrator is reliable or unreliable. Then, research and find a news report. Make a similar evidence chart to determine whether the source is reliable or unreliable.
- Research Ann Radcliffe's definitions of "terror" vs "horror." Discuss whether Poe's use of an unreliable narrator creates a sense of terror or horror for the reader.
- Rewrite the "Tell-Tale Heart" from the point-of-view of one of the other characters (old man, police, neighbor).
- Have students watch PoeMovies adaption of "The Tell-Tale Heart"
    a. **Guided questions:**
        i. Did you expect the narrator in this adaptation to be a woman? Why or why not?
        ii. In the "The Tell-Tale Heart" the narrator's gender is never mentioned. Did this adaptation match how you pictured the story in your head?

Vocabulary

Acuteness (n.) – a harsh or sharp quality; the state or quality of being able to sense slight impressions or differences

Audacity (n.) – the willingness to take bold risks

Conceived (v.) – thought of; to come to mind

Courageously (adj.) – to act with great courage; to show no fear

Cunningly (adj.) – getting what you want in a clever way; crafty; sly; artfully subtle

Derision (n.) – contemptuous ridicule or mockery

Dissimulation (v.) – to hide under a false appearance

Distinctness (n.) – different in a way that you can see, hear, smell, or feel

Dreadful (adj.) – very bad or unpleasant

Enveloped (v.) – to wrap up, cover, or surround completely

Fancy (v.) – to imagine; to think

Fury (n.) – violent anger; wild and dangerous force

Gaily (adj.) – in a happy or lively way; in a bright and colorful way

Gesticulation (n.) – a dramatic gesture used to emphasize one's words

Hearken (harken) (v.) – to listen carefully

Hideous (adj.) – very ugly or disgusting

Mournful (adj.) – feeling, expressing sadness, regret or grief

Muffled (adj.) – a suppressed sound, muted

Precisely (adv.) – exactly; without vagueness.

Profound (adj.) – to have great insight and knowledge; difficult to understand; very strongly felt

Pulsation (n.) – rhythmical throbbing or vibrating

Raved (v.) – to talk wildly or incoherently

Sagacity (n.) – having or showing the ability to understand difficult ideas and situations and to

make good decisions

Scantling (n.) – a piece of lumber of small cross section

Stealthily (adv.) – to act quietly and secretively to avoid being noticed

Stifled (v.) – to make someone unable to breathe properly; to stop someone from doing or

expressing something.

Suavity (n.) – a suave or smoothly agreeable quality; a courteous action

Supposition (n.) – an idea or theory that you believe is true even though you do not have proof

Unperceived (adj.) - unobserved

Vexed (v.) vex – to cause a problem; to annoy or worry someone

“The Cask of Amontillado”

Literary Skills & Devices

- **Foreshadowing**
- **Irony**

“Come,” I said, with decision, “we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi ——”

“Enough,” he said; “the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough.”

“True — true,” I replied;

Paired Short Story

- “The Necklace” Guy de Maupassant
- “The Landlady” by Roald Dahl

Paired Media

- Selected clips from *Knives Out*

Historical Context

- The History of Carnival

Poe Museum Primary Sources

- Cask of Amontillado Illustration by Bernie Wrightson
- First Edition of Cask of Amontillado

Poe Museum Educational Program

Gothic Writing Workshop

Essay Prompts and Activities

Textual-Based Questions

- What was Montresor's reason for seeking revenge on Fortunato? Do you think Montresor's actions are justified?

Contextual Questions

- Why do you think Poe chose Carnival as the setting of the story?
- What makes this story frightening without showing explicit violence?

Activities

Irony Mapping: Students create a three-column chart: Reader Knows / Character Knows / Meaning.

“The Fall of the House of Usher”

Literary Skills

- **Setting**
- **Personification**

Paired Short Story

- “The Haunting of Hill House” Shirley Jackson
- “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
- “There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury

Paired Media

- The Haunting of Hill House 1963 (selected clips)

Historical Context

- Poe’s Childhood Home
- The Fall of the Yellow Wallpaper

Poe Museum Primary Sources

- Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Washington Irving
- The Fall of the House of Usher Lithograph by Albert Sterner

Poe Museum Educational Programs

- The Fall of the House of Usher Guided Reading
- Poe and the Gothic Virtual Program

Essay Prompts and Activities

Textual-Based Questions

- Do you think that the house is alive? Use Poe's use of personification to defend your answer.

Contextual Questions

- How do you think Poe's own childhood home influenced his description of the House of Usher?

Activities

Students will design a plot diagram of the story using a house blueprint. Students are encouraged to creatively design their home using descriptive imagery from the text.

“The Masque of the Red Death”

Literary Skills & Devices

- **Allegory**
- **Color symbolism**

Paired Short Story

- "The Outsider" by H.P. Lovecraft
- Selected texts from *The Decameron* by Boccaccio

Paired Media

- *The Phantom of the Opera 2004* (selected clips)
- “Masque of the Red Death” reading by Basil Rathbone

Historical Context

- Plague History
- Origins of the Black Death
- Cholera Pandemic Terrified and Inspired Edgar Allan Poe

Poe Museum Primary Sources

- The Masque of the Red Death first printed in Graham’s Lady’s and Gentleman’s Magazine

Poe Museum Educational Programs

- The Masque of the Red Death Guided Reading

Essay Prompts and Activities

Textual-Based Questions

- What does the Red Death represent beyond illness?

Contextual Questions

- How does Poe critique power and privilege?

Activities

- Students will create a color mapping activity where they will draw each of the rooms with the corresponding color and visual imagery, then write what each room symbolizes.
- Students will write their own allegory about a modern issue using symbolic settings.
- Research the people knew who passed away because of tuberculosis (Elizabeth Arnold Poe, Virginia Poe, Frances Allan, and William Henry Leonard Poe) and how Poe's loss influenced the story.
- Students will research the Cholera Epidemic of 1831 and connect this with Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death."

“The Raven”

Literary Skills

- **Sound devices**
- **Mood**
- **Symbolism**
- **Narrative poetry**

“And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting

On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;

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!”

Paired Poetry

- O Captain! My Captain! By Walt Whitman
- Jabberwocky by Lewis Carol

Paired Media

- The Simpson’s *Treehouse of Horror*
- Song lyrics emphasizing repetition and mood
- The Philosophy of Composition

Historical Context

- Edgar Allan Poe and the Culture of Mourning
- 19th Century Mourning
- Mourning Customs after Poe’s Death

- Birth of Virginia Clemm

Poe Museum Primary Sources

- Early printing of “The Raven”
- Gustave Dore's Illustration (13 of 25) for “The Raven”
- *Der Rabe* film poster
- *Le Corbeau* film poster

Poe Museum Educational Programs

- “The Raven” Guided Reading
- Poe in Pop Culture Virtual Program

Essay Prompts and Activities

Textual-Based Questions

- How does the Raven function as both symbol and character?
- Track the emotional shift of the speaker from hope to despair.

Contextual Questions

- What real life events may have inspired Poe to write “The Raven?”

Activities

- Students should write their own song lyrics using similar repetition and mood to “The Raven”
- Students will research and analyze adaptions and parodies of “The Raven” in art, literature, music, movies, and fashion. How do these adaptions convey the original mood and meaning of the poem? How do these adaptions change the mood and meaning? Do these changes make it easier to understand the original poem?