



Activity: “The Bells” Guided Reading
Intended Grade/Audience: 7th–8th

<p><u>Overview of the Activity:</u> This <i>guided reading</i> of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Bells” (1848) focuses on developing student understanding of imagery and other figurative language, strengthening reading comprehension, and strengthening expository and persuasive writing skills.</p>	<p><u>Activity Goals:</u> Provide students with an accessible reading of “The Bells” that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promotes a lasting appreciation and interest in Edgar Allan Poe’s work. 2. Strengthens reading comprehension. 3. Strengthens writing skills. 4. Expands vocabulary. 5. Expands knowledge and understanding of literary devices. 6. Demonstrates the impact of an author’s style on a work. 	<p><u>Student Objectives:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will use context clues to understand the poem. 2. Students will identify figurative language and analyze the impact of it on the work. 3. Students will identify the theme of the work and analyze how voice affects it. 4. Students will understand onomatopoeia in the work.
<p><u>Virginia SOLs addressed and/or met:</u></p> <p>For 7th grade:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading - 7.4 The student will read and determine the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases within authentic texts ● Reading - 7.5 The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of a variety of fictional texts, literary nonfiction ● Writing - 7.7 The student will write in a variety of forms to include narrative, expository, persuasive, and reflective with an emphasis on expository and persuasive writing <p>For 8th grade:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading - 8.4 The student will apply knowledge of word origins, and figurative language to extend vocabulary development within authentic texts ● Reading - 8.5 - The student will read and analyze a variety of fictional texts, literary nonfiction, poetry, and drama ● Writing - 8.7 The student will write in a variety of forms to include narrative, expository, persuasive, and reflective with an emphasis on expository and persuasive writing 		<p><u>Common Core standards addressed and/or met:</u></p> <p>CCSS Grade 7 Reading Standards for Literature: - 1, 2, 4, 5</p> <p>CCSS Grade 7 Writing Standards: - 1b, 1c, 7, 9a</p> <p>CCSS Grade 8 Reading Standards for Literature: - 1, 4</p> <p>CCSS Grade 8 Writing Standards: - 1b, 1c, 7, 9a</p>

3.

Hear the loud alarum bells—
 Brazen bells!
What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!
 In the startled ear of Night
 40 How they scream out their affright!
 Too much horrified to speak,
 They can only shriek, shriek,
 Out of tune,
 In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire—
 45 In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,
 Leaping higher, higher, higher,
 With a desperate desire
 And a resolute endeavor
 Now—now to sit, or never,
 50 By the side of the pale-faced moon.
 Oh the bells, bells, bells!
 What a tale their terror tells
 Of Despair!
 How they clang, and clash, and roar!
 55 What a horror they outpour
 On the bosom of the palpitating air!
 Yet the ear, it fully knows,
 By the twanging
 And the clanging
 60 How the danger ebbs and flows:—
 Yes, the ear distinctly tells,
 In the jangling
 And the wrangling,
 How the danger sinks and swells,
 65 By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells—
 Of the bells—
 Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells—
 In the clamor and the clangor of the bells.

4.

70 Hear the tolling of the bells—
 Iron bells!
What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!
 In the silence of the night
 How we shiver with affright
 75 At the melancholy menace of their tone!
 For every sound that floats
 From the rust within their throats
 Is a groan.
 And the people—ah, the people—
 80 They that dwell up in the steeple
 All alone,
 And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,

In that muffled monotone
Feel a glory in so rolling
85 On the human heart a stone—
They are neither man nor woman—
They are neither brute nor human,
They are Ghouls:—
And their king it is who tolls:—
90 And he rolls, rolls, rolls, rolls
Rolls
A Paean from the bells!
And his merry bosom swells
With the Paean of the bells!
95 And he dances, and he yells;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the Paean of the bells—
Of the bells:—
100 Keeping time, time, time
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the throbbing of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells—
To the sobbing of the bells
105 Keeping time, time, time,
As he knells, knells, knells,
In a happy Runic rhyme,
To the rolling of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells:—
110 To the tolling of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

Vocabulary Check: Using context clues, what do you think these words from the text mean?

Runic:

Tintinnabulation:

Balmy:

Euphony:

Brazen:

Turbulency:

Expostulation:

Palpitating:

Monody:

Paean:

Reading Questions: Use the above text to answer the following questions.

Comprehension:

1. In each of the four stanzas in this poem, Poe talks about four different types of bells. What are the four bells described in the poem? What do these bells represent?
2. In lines 36–46, what kind of event is the author describing? Describe the imagery in this scene. How is this a change in tone from the earlier descriptions of bells?
3. In lines 89–113, what role does “the king” play? Do you think the narrator is referring to a literal king or do you think the king is a metaphor for something else? Use evidence from the text to explain your reasoning.

Style:

1. The odd indentation of this poem was chosen specifically by Poe. How does formatting reflect the tone in each stanza and the poem overall?
2. Onomatopoeia is a literary term for words that sound like the noise they mean (e.g. when you say the word sizzle, it sounds a little like something sizzling). Identify three examples of onomatopoeia in “The Bells.” How does the use of onomatopoeia affect the imagery and tone of the poem?

3. Identify three examples of repetition in this poem. How does the repetition of certain words affect the tone? Why do you think the repetition increases over time?
4. Identify three examples where the bells are personified. Compare and contrast when the bells ring by themselves versus when they are rung by others.

Theme:

1. How does the overall tone of the poem shift over the course of the piece?
2. How would you describe the narrator of this poem?
3. Is this poem like other poems you have read? Do you enjoy reading this poem or is it jarring to read? Do you think Poe intentionally made this poem jarring?
4. Read the poem out loud. Does your understanding of poem change hearing it out loud? How did you read each stanza?

Research:

1. Sergei Rachmaninoff is a famous Russian composer who created a symphony inspired by “The Bells.” Listen to Rachmaninoff’s symphony and compare it to Poe’s poem. Does Rachmaninoff convey the same tone as Poe’s poem?

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdUThLpuBJ4>