

EDGAR ALLAN POE



A Little Bit About Us-

Originally founded in 1996 as First Folio Shakespeare Festival, in 2008 we changed our name to First Folio Theatre to better reflect the full breadth of works that we were offering, which includes classic works by writers such as Oscar Wilde, Noël Coward, Edgar Allan Poe, P.G. Wodehouse, and Eugene O'Neill.

As the premier non-profit professional theater in the western suburbs, First Folio's mission is to present intimate productions of classic and contemporary works. By making our home in residence at Mayslake Peabody Estate, we create a unique theatrical experience that enriches the community.

To date, First Folio has produced more than 70 mainstage productions. Our productions have earned 40 Jeff Nominations, 7 Jeff Awards, and 2 After Dark Awards, including a nomination for Best Adaptation for *The Madness of Edgar Allan Poe*.

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Biography of Edgar Allan Poe

The life of America's most famous poet and short story writer was marked with tragedy from an early age. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 19, 1809, he was christened Edgar Poe. His parents, David and Elizabeth, were both actors, but neither experienced a great deal of success. Before Edgar was one year old, his alcoholic father abandoned the family and was never heard from again. (Many biographers list his date of death as 1810, but that is just an assumption.) His mother continued to perform on the stage to support herself and her son.

Surviving newspaper reviews and letters from the time indicate that Elizabeth was most well known for her extravagant death scenes in the many famous melodramas of the time. Tragically, she contracted consumption and passed away when Edgar was less than three years old.

The young child was taken in by one of Elizabeth's close friends, Mrs. Fanny Allan, and her husband John, a wealthy merchant in Richmond, Virginia. John Allan provided Edgar with an excellent education and much travel, including a move to England when Edgar was six. The family returned to Richmond when Edgar was eleven. Fanny Allan doted on young Edgar, and the boy even added "Allan" as his middle name. However, Edgar was never close to John Allan and John never formally adopted the boy.

Edgar and John's relationship became further strained when Edgar enrolled at the University of Virginia. While there, he accumulated gambling debts and when his foster father refused to pay them, Edgar was forced to leave school. In 1827, he enlisted in the army and served for two years, rising to the rank of Sergeant-Major, the highest rank an enlisted man could achieve.

In early 1829, his foster mother Fanny Allan passed away, dying of consumption, the same horrible disease that had claimed his mother. Following Fanny's death, Poe discovered that while Fanny had been ill, her husband John had been having affairs with other women. This was the final blow to their relationship and after quarrelling, John Allan disinherited Edgar completely and ordered him to leave Richmond.

In 1830, Poe enrolled at West Point Military Academy, but his failure to attend classes and training sessions resulted in his being discharged in 1831. Poe then moved to Baltimore where he moved in with his Aunt Maria Clemm, her daughter Virginia, and Edgar's older brother Henry, who was already in failing health. Within the year, Henry was dead, another victim of consumption.

Throughout his early life, Edgar had exhibited a love of writing, even managing to have his first volume of poetry published when he was only 18 years old. Following the death of his brother, Poe determined to make his living as an author. This was an unusual decision at that time. Due to poor copyright laws and other factors, no American author had ever made a living solely by writing.

He spent the next 18 years struggling to support himself and his wife. In addition to his poetry, he wrote short horror stories, the first detective stories, literary criticism, humor, and even early science fiction. He worked as an editor and continually attempted to start his own literary magazine. However, despite eventually achieving a great deal of fame for his macabre stories and emotionally charged poetry, Poe was constantly on the brink of bankruptcy.

Through it all, the one constant in his adult life was the love of his wife, Virginia. In 1835, Poe married his cousin Virginia Clemm. Poe was 26 and Virginia was just a few weeks shy of her 14th birthday. By all accounts, their marriage was a happy union, despite their constant poverty. One night in 1842, Virginia was entertaining her husband by singing him a song. She began to cough, and when she removed the handkerchief from her mouth, both she and Poe could see little droplets of blood on it...the first signs of consumption. Virginia's health steadily declined, and in 1847, she passed away in their home in the Fordham section of the Bronx in New York City.

Poe continued to write, but his health also declined, due in part to bouts of alcoholism. In 1849, Poe sent copies of his latest poem, "Annabel Lee," to a number of friends and editors. This was something he had never done with any of his works before, distributing copies of them prior to their being published. The poem would not be published until after Poe's death, at which time it became a sensation.

Shortly after distributing this poem, Poe went on a business trip, one more attempt to raise money for his own literary magazine. However, when his train arrived in Baltimore, Poe disappeared. Two days later, he was found on the streets of Baltimore delirious, "in great distress, and...in need of immediate assistance", according to the man who found him. He died on Sunday, October 7, 1849, having never been coherent long enough to explain what had happened to him. He was wearing clothes that were not his own, and witnesses said he repeatedly called out the name "Reynolds" on the night before his death, though it is unclear to whom he was referring. All medical records, including his death certificate, have been lost, so the actual cause of death remains a mystery. Modern forensic experts have offered opinions that have included alcohol poisoning, heart disease, epilepsy, cholera, and rabies, but the true cause will never be known. His death remains as mysterious as one of his stories.

THINKING QUESTION

- 1) The opening line of this biography describes Poe's life as "tragic." Find three events in Poe's life that support this view. Then explain how these tragic events may have contributed to Poe's fascination with stories of death and horror.**
- 2) Look up the disease "consumption." What do we call it today? What are its symptoms? How do people actually die from this disease? (EXTRA: Read "The Masque of the Red Death" and find clues that the "red death" plague may be Poe's version of consumption.)**

POE'S MARRIAGE TO VIRGINIA CLEMM

As mentioned in the biography above, Edgar Allan Poe married his cousin Virginia when she was just 13 years old. By today's standards, these facts make their marriage seem quite unusual and perhaps even distasteful. However, when analyzing the behaviors of people from another era, it is important to look at their actions within the context of their own time. To help achieve this, research the following questions.

- 1) In the play *Romeo and Juliet*, how old was Juliet when she was married? (BONUS: How old was her mother when Juliet was born?)**
- 2) What was the average life expectancy for American women in the early 1800's? Why was it so much less than it is today?**
- 3) How were the following famous married couples related?**
 - a. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert**
 - b. Charles Darwin and his wife Emma**
 - c. Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor**
 - d. Rudy Giuliani (former mayor of NYC) and his first wife Regina**

In light of this information, how do you think the society of the time viewed Poe's marriage?

SIDE NOTE:

Interestingly, there were members of Edgar and Virginia's family who did not approve of their marriage. They wanted her to marry a different cousin---who was actually older than Edgar! Their objections were not to Poe's age or to their familial relationship. They just worried that he would not be able to support Virginia, while the other cousin was a successful businessman.

Edgar and Virginia's jilted cousin never forgave them. After Poe's death, he worked with one of Poe's literary rivals to destroy Poe's reputation, and together they burned many of Poe's surviving papers, thus adding to the mystery surrounding his life by destroying much of the evidence that later biographers would seek.

Edgar Allan Poe and His Works in Modern Culture

There have been hundreds of adaptations of Poe's work in theatre, film and television and music.

There were a series of Roger Corman films starring Vincent Price in the 1960's. These were often loose adaptations. They include *House of Usher* (1960), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), *Tales of Terror* (1962), *The Raven* (1963), and *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964).

The Simpsons has made several references to Poe's works. The original "Treehouse of Horror" episode contains a segment in which James Earl Jones reads Poe's poem "The Raven", with Homer playing the narrator, Marge making a brief cameo appearance as Lenore, and Bart as the raven. The poem is presented verbatim, though a few lines are cut, and Poe was actually credited as a co-writer of the segment (alongside Sam Simon). "Lisa's Rival" features Lisa competing against a girl who recreates a scene from "The Tell-Tale Heart". In the episode "Saturdays of Thunder", a TV advert shows Poe's tombstone being cleaned by Dr. Nick Riviera. In the episode "Lisa the Simpson", the House of Usher is shown exploding in the fictional Fox show *When Buildings Collapse*. In the episode "Homer's Triple Bypass", Homer rams Hans Moleman driving a truck with a house on the back. The sign on the house reads "birthplace of Edgar Allan Poe".

Batman: Nevermore (2003) is an Elseworlds' mini-series from DC Comics written by Len Wein, with art by Guy Davis. In the story, Batman teams up with Poe to solve a number of murders.

In 2004, the DVD release of *Hellboy* included a 10-minute adaptation of "The Tell-Tale Heart."

Futurama: in the episode "Bender's Game" (2008), Bender's relaxation therapy while in the robot asylum closely resembles the plot of "The Pit and the Pendulum."

Poe was one of the images used on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, released by the Beatles in 1967. They also reference him on the song, "I Am the Walrus."

In 1976, The Alan Parsons Project released a concept album inspired by the works of Poe. The album referenced "The Raven," "The Cask of Amontillado," and "The Fall of the House of Usher" among other works.

Blues Traveler referenced the first line of "The Raven" in their song "Run-Around" from 1994.

Britney Spears used the poem "Dream Within a Dream" as well as other works by Poe as inspiration for her 2001-2002 concert tour by the same name.

In *Snoopy!!! The Musical*, there is a musical number in act one titled "Edgar Allan Poe." In the number, some of the characters worry that their teacher is going to quiz them on the

writer, whom they know little about. The other characters share information about the writer in song form.

The Raven (2012) stars John Cusack as Poe, in a story about the last days of Poe's life in which he tries to track down a serial killer whose murders parallel deaths in Poe's stories.

In season 2 of the anime series *Bungo Stray Dogs*, a series composed of characters based on famous authors, Poe appears as a member of "The Guild". In this show, Poe's power is called "Black Cat in the Rue Morgue", which can transport readers into the setting of any novel that they are currently reading.

In the *SpongeBob SquarePants* episode "Squeaky Boots," SpongeBob receives a pair of annoying squeaky boots but Mr. Krabs plots to get rid of them. He steals the boots and hides them under the floorboards in the Krusty Krab. The episode references Poe's short story "The Tell-Tale Heart."

WORKS INCLUDED IN THIS PERFORMANCE OR THIS PACKET and SOME PRIMARY LITERARY DEVICES USED

“The Bells” (1848)

- Alliteration (“What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells”)
- Onomatopoeia (“tinkle/rustle”)
- Assonance (“molten, golden, notes”)
- Use of driving rhythm (“What a world of merriment their melody foretells”)

“The Raven” (1845)

- Use of trochaic rhythm (Once upon a midnight dreary)
- Internal rhyme
 (“So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating”)

“Annabel Lee”(published posthumously in 1849)

- Use of mixed rhythm, both anapestic and iambic
 (“It was many and many a year ago,
 In a kingdom by the sea”)

“The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843)

- First person narration
- Imagery
 “I resolved to open a little -- a very, very little crevice in the lantern -- until at length a single dim ray like the thread of the spider shot out from the crevice and fell upon the vulture eye.”

“The Pit and the Pendulum” (1842)

- First person narration
- Adaptation to a dramatic form

A Sampling of Poems and Short Stories by Edgar Allan Poe:

The Bells

by Edgar Allan Poe

I

Hear the sledges with the bells -
Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the heavens seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells -
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

II

Hear the mellow wedding bells -
Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
Through the balmy air of night
How they ring out their delight!
From the molten-golden notes,
And all in tune,
What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
On the moon!
Oh, from out the sounding cells
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
How it swells!
How it dwells
On the Future! -how it tells
Of the rapture that impels
To the swinging and the ringing
Of the bells, bells, bells,
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells -
To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

III

Hear the loud alarum bells -
Brazen bells!
What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!
In the startled ear of night
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,
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,
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!
What a horror they outpour
On the bosom of the palpitating air!
Yet the ear it fully knows,
By the twanging
And the clanging,
How the danger ebbs and flows;
Yet the ear distinctly tells,
In the jangling
And the wrangling,
How the danger sinks and swells,
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!

IV

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
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 -
They that dwell up in the steeple,
All alone,
And who tolling, tolling, tolling,
In that muffled monotone,
Feel a glory in so rolling
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;
And he rolls, rolls, rolls,
Rolls
A paeon from the bells!
And his merry bosom swells
With the paeon of the bells!
And he dances, and he yells;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the paeon of the bells,
Of the bells -
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;
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 -
To the tolling of the bells,
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells -
To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

The Raven

by 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 some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"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
From my books surcease of sorrow--sorrow for the lost Lenore--
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore--
Nameless here for evermore.

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

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
"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.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortals 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!"--
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping something 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--
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.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he,
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door--
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door--
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then the ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore--
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
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."

But the Raven, sitting lonely on that placid bust, spoke only
That one word, as if its 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."
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
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore--
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of 'Never--nevermore.'"

But the Raven still beguiling all my sad soul 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
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;
This and more I sat divining, 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
Swung by Seraphim 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 nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

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

"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,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore--
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Be that 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 has spoken!
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;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadows on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted--nevermore!

Annabel Lee

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and *she* was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea:
But we loved with a love that was more than love —
I and my Annabel Lee;
With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,
Went envying her and me —
Yes! — that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we —
Of many far wiser than we —
And neither the angels in heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling — my darling — my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

An Edited Version of “The Tell-Tale Heart” which can be compared to the actual performance version as presented in the video.

What elements has the playwright added to the script to make it work better as a play?

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.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture--a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees--very gradually--I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution--with what foresight--with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it--oh so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly--very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! would a madman have been so wise as this, And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously--oh, so cautiously--cautiously (for the hinges creaked)--I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights--every night just at midnight--but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he has passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I felt the extent of my own powers--of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back--but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers,) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I

kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in bed, crying out--"Who's there?"

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening;--just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief--oh, no!--it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself--"It is nothing but the wind in the chimney--it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel--although he neither saw nor heard--to feel the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little--a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it--you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily--until, at length a simple dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye.

It was open--wide, wide open--and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness--all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the sense?--now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eve. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment!--do you mark me well I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the

beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me--the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once--once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye--not even his--could have detected any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash out--no stain of any kind--no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all--ha! ha!

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock--still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart,--for what had I now to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbour during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled,--for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search--search well. I led them, at length, to his chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct:--It continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definiteness--until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

No doubt I now grew very pale;--but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased--and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound--much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath--and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly--more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I

arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men--but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what could I do? I foamed--I raved--I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder--louder--louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!--no, no! They heard!--they suspected!--they knew!--they were making a mockery of my horror!--this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! and now--again!--hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!

"Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed!--tear up the planks! here, here!--It is the beating of his hideous heart!"

The Performance Script for “The Pit and the Pendulum” as adapted by David Rice

Guard: Prisoner LaRoche, by order of the Grand Inquisitor Tomás de Torquemada, you have been sentenced to death for the crime of heresy. May God have mercy on your soul.

The prisoner swoons as the guard laughs. As the guard shuts the door, the lights black out completely. The audience hears the sound of a metal door clanging shut followed by the dripping of water in the cell. The prisoner stands. His eyes remain closed as he reaches out to feel the floor. The following is a soliloquy, despite being in the past tense. At no time does he acknowledge the existence of the audience.

Prisoner: Cold. Damp. Oh god, what have I done? Oh god, what have *they* done? Oh god, why have you abandoned me? (*He sits up, eyes still closed.*) I longed to open my eyes, yet dare not employ my vision, not because I fear to look upon things horrible, but in fear that there should be nothing to see. (*With an effort he forces his eyes open and confronts the cell, which to him is in total darkness. He reaction is filled with desperation, gasping for breath as he thrusts his hands in every direction, but always failing to touch anything.*)

Darkness! Nothingness. I dread to move a step, lest I should find naught but the walls of a tomb. And yet to what worse fate could I be condemned than my own fear? I resolved to cross the area of the enclosure. (*He begins to walk forward, trips, and falls, ending with his face over the edge of the platform.*)

That fall saved my life. A peculiar smell of decayed fungus arose to my nostrils. I put forward my arm and shuddered to find that I had fallen at the very brink of a pit.

Groping about the masonry just below the margin, I succeeded in dislodging a small fragment, and let it fall into the abyss. For nearly a minute I hearkened to its reverberations as it dashed against the sides of the chasm in its descent: at length... (*We hear the sound of something bouncing off a wall and hitting water, but the sound is very distant.*) I swooned. (*He takes his place against the wall. When he is in place, a red pin-spot hits his face and the dripping of the water stops.*)

Upon awaking, I found the room dimly lit. But when I tried to move, I realized that I now lay upon my back. A long strap restrained me, leaving at liberty only my head, and my left arm. Groping with this free arm, in the faint light, I discovered an earthen dish filled with pungent meat by my side on the floor. Looking upwards I surveyed the ceiling of my prison. In one of its panels a very singular figure riveted my whole attention. It was the painted figure of Time as he is commonly represented, save that, in lieu of a scythe, he held a huge pendulum. (*The sound of the pendulum begins. At first it is slow and distant, but the volume and pace increase during the following, until the audience can “feel” it above their own heads. The sound comes from speakers above and on either side of the audience, and shifts from L to R and back again, simulating the sound of the pendulum passing over the audience’s heads.*)

Its sweep was brief and slow. I watched it for some minutes, somewhat in fear, but more in wonder. *(The sound of rats is heard in the distance, increasing in volume and number of rats as he describes them. We should hear their squealing and the scrabbling of their feet and their snuffling sounds as they investigate the food and the prisoner.)*

A slight noise attracted my notice, and, looking to the floor, I saw several enormous rats traversing it. They had issued from the pit, which now was within view. While I gazed, they came up in troops, hurriedly, with ravenous eyes, allured by the scent of the meat.

When I again cast my eyes upward, what I saw confounded and amazed me. The sweep of the pendulum had increased in extent by nearly a yard. But what mainly disturbed me was the idea that it had perceptibly descended. I now saw that its nether extremity was formed of a crescent of glittering steel as keen as that of a razor, and the whole hissed as it swung through the air. *(The sound of the rats has faded, and the sound of the pendulum is much closer now.)*

I counted the rushing vibrations of the steel! Inch by inch -- line by line -- down it came until finally it swept so closely over me as to fan me with its acrid breath. I prayed -- I wearied heaven with prayer for its more speedy descent. Down -- certainly, relentlessly down! It vibrated within three inches of my bosom! Down -- still unceasingly -- still inevitably down! I gasped and struggled at each vibration. I shrunk convulsively at its every sweep. Death would have been a relief, oh, how unspeakable! Then, to my astonishment, there flashed upon my mind what I cannot better describe than as an unformed half of an idea of deliverance.

I remembered the rats. They were wild, bold -- ravenous. I reached down and covered my hands with what remained of the pungent dish, and then I thoroughly rubbed my bonds wherever I could reach; then, I lay breathlessly still. Observing that I now remained without motion, *(the sound of a couple rats is heard, but a general rush of rats soon begins; the sound of the rats should increase in intensity and passion as he describes them)* one or two of the boldest leapt upon the framework, and smelt at my bindings. This seemed the signal for a general rush.

Forth from the pit they hurried in fresh troops and leapt in hundreds upon my person. The measured movement of the pendulum disturbed them not at all. Avoiding its strokes, they busied themselves with the anointed bandage. They pressed -- they swarmed upon me in ever accumulating heaps. They writhed upon my throat; their cold lips sought my own; I was half stifled by their thronging. Yet one minute, and I felt that the struggle would be over. *(By now the sound of the pendulum has increased so that the audience can all but feel it brushing their scalps. The tempo of the pendulum has also picked up considerably.)*

Suddenly, the strap fell away from my body. But the stroke of the pendulum already pressed upon my bosom. It had divided the serge of the robe. It had cut through the linen beneath. But the moment of escape had arrived. At a wave of my hand my

deliverers hurried tumultuously away. (*Rat sounds disappear into the distance.*)
With a steady movement -- cautious, sidelong, shrinking, and slow -- I slid from the embrace of the bandage and beyond the sweep of the scimitar. For the moment, at least, I was free.

Free! – and still in the grasp of the Inquisition! I had scarcely stepped from my bed of horror upon the stone floor of the prison, when the motion of the hellish machine ceased. (*The pendulum sound ceases and is replaced by the mechanical sound of a winch raising the pendulum back up.*)

As I beheld it drawn up into the ceiling by some invisible force, (*lights go to black*) I was plunged into darkness once more and a new sound encircled me. Struggling to imagine what hellish torment would be visited on me next, I felt myself slowly but relentlessly pressed forward. The walls behind me were moving, pushing me inexorably towards the yawning chasm of the pit. (*As the sound of a moving stone/iron wall is heard, the walls begin to glow red and move, pushing the prisoner towards the brink of the pit.*)

I pushed against the walls with all my might in a futile effort to halt the wall's advance. Death, any death but that of the pit! The closing walls pressed me resistlessly onwards. I felt that I tottered upon the brink —

Trumpets are heard in the background, amidst a sound of fighting. The door bursts open and in the faint light we see the prisoner being pulled to safety as a soldier in French uniform calls out :

Soldier: Allez! Allez! General LaSalle has entered Toledo. You are free!

The Process of Adaptation- Statement by David Rice

The job of the author of a short story or novel is to *tell you what did happen in the past*. However, the job of a playwright is to *show you what is happening in the present moment for those characters*. Thus, while the short story writer may focus on description, analysis, and inner thoughts, the playwright must focus on action and dialogue.

The key to adapting short stories to the stage, then, is to find the balance between using the author's own words and transferring those words into action on the stage. This is particularly tricky when adapting the works of an author such as Poe for a number of reasons. First of all, his works are so well known that the adaptor cannot make any substantial changes. Second, Poe's writing style is so beautiful and so distinct, that any changes the playwright makes must be made so as to fit as seamlessly as possible with Poe's own words. Third, many of Poe's most famous stories are written as First Person stories. Thus, the entire story is a sort of internal monologue. My job was to find ways to transfer those thoughts into action on the stage.

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Activity: Autobiographical Writing Exercise- “Write what you know”

Edgar Allan Poe’s stories and poems incorporate a lot of details from his life, but are not strictly autobiographical. As a class talk about what you know about Poe and things from the play that were influenced by his life and experiences.

Think about something that has happened to you that changed your life or was really important. Take a few minutes to write about what happened to you and how it made you feel.

Use your personal experience as a starting point for a fictional story. This does not mean that the story is about you, but that the plot, characters and ideas are influenced by your experiences. There is an old saying that you should “write what you know;” this is great advice, but can be limiting. Use a personal story as a jumping off point. You can write anything, as long as you start with what you understand.

NOTE: Please keep in mind that you will be sharing your stories with the class when deciding what personal story to use as inspiration. Make sure it is something that you are comfortable sharing with others.

Read your short stories to the class.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO PACKET QUESTIONS

Poe's Biography

THINKING QUESTION

1) The opening line of this biography describes Poe's life as "tragic." Find three events in Poe's life that support this view. Then explain how these tragic events may have contributed to Poe's fascination with stories of death and horror.

- *His father's desertion of the family*
- *His mother's death*
- *His foster father's rejection*
- *His foster mother's death*
- *His brother's death*
- *His poverty*
- *His wife's death*

- *The preponderance of death, especially multiple deaths from the same disease, could easily lead to a fixation not only with death, but also with death accompanied by blood*

- *The loss of his two mother figures and his wife could easily lead to a fixation with the death and rebirth of female figures.*

2) Look up the disease "consumption." What do we call it today? What are its symptoms? How do people actually die from this disease? (EXTRA: Read "The Masque of the Red Death" and find clues that the "red death" plague may be Poe's version of consumption.)

- *Consumption is now known as tuberculosis or TB*
- *Symptoms include coughing up blood, fever, sweating, pains in the chest*
- *Death is caused by respiratory failure, but may involve drowning/suffocating in one's own blood*

- *In "The Masque of the Red Death" some clues are as follows*
 - *The disease is described as a "pestilence" (or plague)*
 - *"Blood was its Avatar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood."*
 - *"His vesture was dabbled in blood—and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror" much like the droplets of blood coughed up by a TB sufferer*
 - *"And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all" which could be an allusion to all of the loss Poe suffered in his life from TB/consumption*

POE'S MARRIAGE TO VIRGINIA CLEMM

1) In the play *Romeo and Juliet*, how old was Juliet when she was married?

(BONUS: How old was her mother when Juliet was born?)

- *The nurse and Juliet's mother point out that it is a "fortnight and odd days" to Lamas Night, at which time Juliet "shall be fourteen." Thus, she is just over two weeks shy of her 14th birthday*
- *Lady Capulet tells Juliet, "I was your Mother, much upon these years, that you are now a Maid." Thus, she was only 14 herself when Juliet was born, making her 28 at the time of the play. It is worth noting that Lord Capulet later says that is has been more than 30 years since he wore a mask and danced at a ball, indicating that he is in his fifties at the time of the play.*

2) What was the average life expectancy for American women in the early 1800's? Why was it so much less than it is today?

- *The average life expectancy for women in the first half of the 19th C was 30.*
- *Lack of proper hygiene, lack of medicine, lack of knowledge of what causes disease were all contributing factors. It also should be noted that the #1 cause of death for women over the age of 13 was complications from childbirth.*

3) How were the following famous married couples related?

- Queen Victoria and Prince Albert** (*First cousins*)
- Charles Darwin and his wife Emma** (*First cousins*)
- Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor** (*Second cousins*)
- Rudy Giuliani (former mayor of NYC) and his first wife Regina** (*Second cousins*)

In light of this information, how do you think the society of his own time viewed Poe's marriage?

- *Most of the people of his time would have found the marriage totally acceptable. It is also important to note that the age difference between them was not at all unusual. Women often married men who were 10 or more years older than they, because older men had established themselves in business. The wife might also be the 2nd or even 3rd wife of a successful man, whose previous wives may have died in childbirth.*

Activity: Autobiographical Writing Exercise- "Write what you know"

Give the students about 5-10 minutes to write down their initial ideas, then introduce that this is a starting point for a fictional story. Then give them 10-15 minutes to write before sharing out loud. The time allotted for each activity can be adjusted based on the time you have and how the students are responding to the prompts.

Note: this could also be an assignment they take home. Some students may not feel comfortable sharing with the class because they are writing things of a personal nature. If this is the case, don't insist they share with everyone.