Name: _____ Class: _____

The Raven

By Edgar Allan Poe
1845

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was an American author, poet, and literary critic whose works are still widely read today. "The Raven" is perhaps his most famous poem, celebrated for its musicality, form, and supernatural atmosphere. As you read, take notes on how the speaker views the raven, as well as how the poem's structure contributes to its tone.



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[1] 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.
[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[1] 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;
[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; —
This it is and nothing more."

[1] 1. the act or process of being brought to an end

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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 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!" —
Merely this and nothing more.

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 —
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[2] made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien[3] of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door —
Perched upon a bust of Pallas[4] just above my chamber door — Perched,
and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling[5] my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance[6] it wore,
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,[7]
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore —
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"[8]
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

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[2] 2. acknowledgement of another's superiority, such as in the form of a bow

[3] 3. a demeanor or air

[4] 4. Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom

[5] . **Beguile** ***(verb)*** to charm or enchant, often in a deceptive way

[6] . **Countenance** ***(noun)*** a person's face or facial expression

[7] 7. a coward

[8] . Pluto is the Roman god of death, also known as Hades in Greek mythology. The Plutonian shore is a reference to the afterlife or underworld.

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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 the placid[9] 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."
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[10] of his Hope 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
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous[11] 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[12]
Swung by Seraphim[13] 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[14] from thy memories of Lenore;

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[9] . **Placid** ***(adjective)*** not easily upset or excited; involving little movement or activity

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Quaff,[15] oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"

Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

10. mournful songs or poems
11. **Ominous *(adjective)*** suggesting that something bad is going to happen
12. a vessel for burning incense
13. an order of angels
14. Nepenthe refers to a substance capable of causing forgetfulness of pain and sorrow.
15. to drink deeply

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! — prophet still, if bird or devil! —

Whether Tempter[10] sent, or whether tempest[11] 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?[12] — 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,[13]

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 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!

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[14] 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;

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[10] 6. also known as "the Devil"

[11] . **Tempest *(noun)*** a violent, windy storm

[12] . This is a reference to the Biblical quote from Jeremiah 8:22 — "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?"

[13] 9. Aidenn is a variant spelling of the Biblical Eden.

[14] . **Pallid *(adjective)*** pale or white

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And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor Shall
be lifted — nevermore!

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following best describes the relationship between the speaker and Lenore? A. Lenore was the speaker's lover who died.
   B. Lenore is the speaker's enemy and has cursed him.
   C. Lenore was the speaker's lover who broke up with him.
   D. Lenore is the speaker's friend with whom the speaker is secretly in love.

2. PART A: Which of the following best describes a central theme of the text?
   A. Loss and grief can have powerful effects on the mind.
   B. The supernatural is proof that death is not the end.
   C. Fear is only a state of mind, and cannot significantly harm anyone.
   D. Evil deeds will always come back to haunt us.

3. PART B: Which TWO of the following quotes best support the answer to Part A?
   A. "'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door — / Only this and nothing more.'" (Lines 5-6)
   B. "Eagerly I wished the morrow; — vainly I had sought to borrow / From my books surcease of sorrow — sorrow for the lost Lenore — " (Lines 9-10)
   C. "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.'" (Lines 69-72)
   D. "Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer / Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor." (Lines 79-80)
   E. "'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! — prophet still, if bird or devil! — / Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore'" (Lines 85-86)
   F. "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!" (Lines 105-108)

4. Summarize how the speaker views the raven over the course of the poem. Cite evidence in you answer.

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5. How do the allusions, or references, made to Pallas (Athena) and Pluto (Hades) inform the character of the raven?

   A. These allusions make the raven seem otherworldly and informs his symbolic nature as a possible messenger from the afterlife.
   B. These allusions imply that the raven is far more powerful than it at first seems and it is there to cast judgement on the speaker.
   C. These allusions contribute to the raven's characterization as the speaker's punishment, as classical gods were often seen as cruel and petty.
   D. These allusions remind the reader that the speaker is mentally unbalanced and mistaking a raven for a god.

6. Why does the speaker react poorly to the raven's response of "Nevermore" in stanzas 15-16?

   A. The speaker is unsettled by the raven's repetition of "Nevermore" because he believes the raven learned it from a depressed former master and intends to make him his new owner.
   B. The speaker begs the raven to leave, to which the raven responds "Nevermore"; the speaker becomes frustrated in these stanzas as he attempts to make it leave.
   C. In these stanzas, the speaker asks the raven if there is an afterlife and if he will be reunited with Lenore there, to which the raven answers "Nevermore"; the speaker takes these answers seriously and thus becomes upset.
   D. The speaker is frustrated by the bird's catchphrase and begs it to stop talking.

7. Which TWO of the following quotes best embody how the imagery develops the supernatural atmosphere of the poem?

   A. "Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December" (Line 7)
   B. "Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning, / Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before." (Lines 31-32)
   C. "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 — " (Lines 39-40)
   D. "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 — "(Lines 68-70)
   E. "Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer / Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor." (Lines 79-80)
   F. "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 (Lines 103-106).

8. How does the overall use of repetition in the poem contribute to its mood?

   A. The poem's repetitive and rigid structure contrasts the speaker's declining mental state, thus contributing to the crazed mood of the poem.
   B. The poem's repetition of the negative response "Nevermore" contributes to the lethargic and dispassionate mood of the poem.
   C. The poem's use of repetition and alliteration creates a dreamy mood, as the author thinks of his love, Lenore.

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D. The poem's use of repetition — namely the tapping, the narrator's calls for Lenore, and the raven's catchphrase of "Nevermore" — contributes to the overall suspenseful, eerie mood.

9. How does the poem's use of internal rhyme contribute to the tone of the piece? Cite at least one example in your answer.

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Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. How do we deal with grief? Find evidence from "The Raven," from your experience, and from other works of literature or art.

2. In the context of this poem, how are we changed by love? Cite evidence from "The Raven," from your experience, and from other works of literature or art.

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