Name: _____

The Tell-Tale Heart

Monitor Your Comprehension

B SUSPENSE
In lines 23–47, the narrator describes what he does repeatedly, night after night. Why does this repetition create a sense of dread?

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. B

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.[2] 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.

C SUSPENSE
Reread lines 62–69. In what way does the characters' inaction create tension?

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 the 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[3] in the wall. C

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or 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

stifled (stī'fəld) *adj.* smothered
stifle *v.*

2. **sagacity** (sə-găs'ĭ-tē): sound judgment.
3. **death watches:** deathwatch beetles—insects that make a tapping sound with their heads.

LIVEWORKSHEETS