



Book club 37: Madness & horror

The Stories of Edgar Allan Poe
by Edgar Allan Poe

Rules

In this book club you will discuss *The Stories of Edgar Allan Poe* by Edgar Allan Poe in a group of 4-6 readers. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds:

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 questions about the plot. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of asking and answering questions each of you have about the book/story: in turn, the players say what they did not understand about the book and try to find an answer together. When the biggest confusions are solved, round 3 starts.
- 3 Round 3 consists of discussion questions. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions from round 1 gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is when you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit www.litlab.nl. A teacher's guide and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at www.litlab.nl/docenten.



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The Stories of Edgar Allan Poe

Introduction

'Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night.' (from *Eleonora*, p. 35)

Welcome to a world where the strange, the mad, and the horrific are commonplace. A world where people are buried alive and where murders are committed by unexpected perpetrators and psychological torture is taken to its limits. Here, death reigns supreme.

It is also a world that gave birth to many of the icons of horror fiction we know today: a world of suspense, dark atmospheres and brooding narrators. It is a world that is said to have inspired the creation of Great Britain's most famous detective, but at the same time is deeply connected to its American context.

This book club invites you to engage with the many worlds that were brought to life in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe.

Round 1: Quiz

Turn over the 5 cards with quiz questions one by one. Write down the answer on a piece of paper.

Round 2: Initial questions

What questions popped into your head while reading *The Stories of Edgar Allan Poe*? Were there any parts that left you confused or wondering? Take turns sharing your questions about the story and try to come up with answers together. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

Round 3: Discussion

The player with the most correct answers to the quiz questions gets to turn over a card first from one of the two piles of discussion questions. Once they have answered the question, the other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

Round 4: Review

Review *The Stories of Edgar Allan Poe* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



Question 1

Why does M. Valdemar agree to take part in the experiment in *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*?

Question 2

Who is the narrator in *The Pit and the Pendulum*, and why has he been imprisoned?

Question 3

Who turns out to be the murderer in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*?

Question 4

In three of the stories, someone is buried alive. Which three stories are these?

Question 5

How is the murder in *The Tell-Tale Heart* finally revealed?

Answers

- 1 Because he is dying and believes he has nothing left to lose.
- 2 An unnamed prisoner of the Spanish Inquisition. His exact crime is never revealed.
- 3 An escaped orangutan from Borneo.
- 4 *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Black Cat*, and *The Cask of Amontillado*.
- 5 The narrator imagines hearing the old man's heartbeat and confesses to the police.



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



Personal connections? 1

Edgar Allan Poe is famous for developing the genre of gothic horror in America. Did these stories feel like horror stories to you? Why or why not?

Personal connections? 2

In *The Cask of Amontillado*, we never learn exactly what Fortunato did to make Montresor want revenge. Does this change the way you judge Montresor's actions? Do you think revenge is ever justified?

Personal connections? 3

Some of Poe's stories, such as *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Purloined Letter*, are considered the first detective stories. How do you feel these stories are similar to or different from modern detective stories?

Personal connections? 4

Poe's stories can sometimes be difficult to read because of the rich language, long sentences, and references to literature and culture. What effect did his style have on your reading experience? Did you enjoy his writing style? Why or why not?

Personal connections? 5

In *William Wilson*, the main character is warned several times about his behaviour, but he does not listen. Why do you think people sometimes ignore advice or warnings? Have you ever realised afterwards that someone was trying to help you?

Personal connections? 6

In *The Masque of the Red Death*, Prince Prospero uses his wealth to protect himself and his friends from the plague. What do you think of his decision? Would you have done the same? Why or why not?

Personal connections? 7

Although *Ligeia* and *Eleonora* both explore love and loss, the narrators deal with these experiences in very different ways. Which narrator do you understand better, and why? Explain your answer using examples from the stories and from your own ideas about love and loyalty.

Personal connections? 8

Many of Poe's characters seem strange, obsessed, or deeply troubled at first. As you read their stories, did you begin to understand any of them better? Did you recognise any of their thoughts or feelings, even if you disagreed with their actions? Explain your answer using examples from the stories.



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

6

Personal connections?

5

Personal connections?

4

Personal connections?

8

Personal connections?

7



Food for thought? 1

What kinds of narrators does Poe often use, and what effect do these narrators have on the stories? Give examples from the stories.

Food for thought? 2

Poe is known for creating suspense. Which techniques does he use to build suspense? Do you notice any similarities in the way suspense is created across the stories? Use examples from at least two stories.

Food for thought? 3

In *The Black Cat*, the narrator describes a sudden change in his mood at the start of the story. What do you think causes this change? Does the story give you any clues?

Food for thought? 4

How does Poe portray women in his stories? Consider *Ligeia*, *Eleonora*, *The Black Cat*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. How do the female characters influence the male protagonists? Use examples from the text.

Food for thought? 5

Think about the settings in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Masque of the Red Death*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, and *The Cask of Amontillado*. What do these settings add to the stories? Use examples from the text.

Food for thought? 6

In *William Wilson*, who or what do you think the second William Wilson represents? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Food for thought? 7

The experiment in *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar* is driven by scientific curiosity. What do you think Poe wants the reader to question about this experiment? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

Food for thought? 8

In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the narrator confesses even though the police seem convinced of his innocence. What might this suggest about guilt and its effect on the narrator's mental state? Support your answer with evidence from the text.



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

1

Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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