

Study Guide for the performance by DAVID KELTZ as

Edgar Allan Poe

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Target Audience: Grades 5 - High School

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Portrait miniature of Elizabeth Arnold Poe, used by permission of the Rare Book Department, Free Library of Philadelphia.

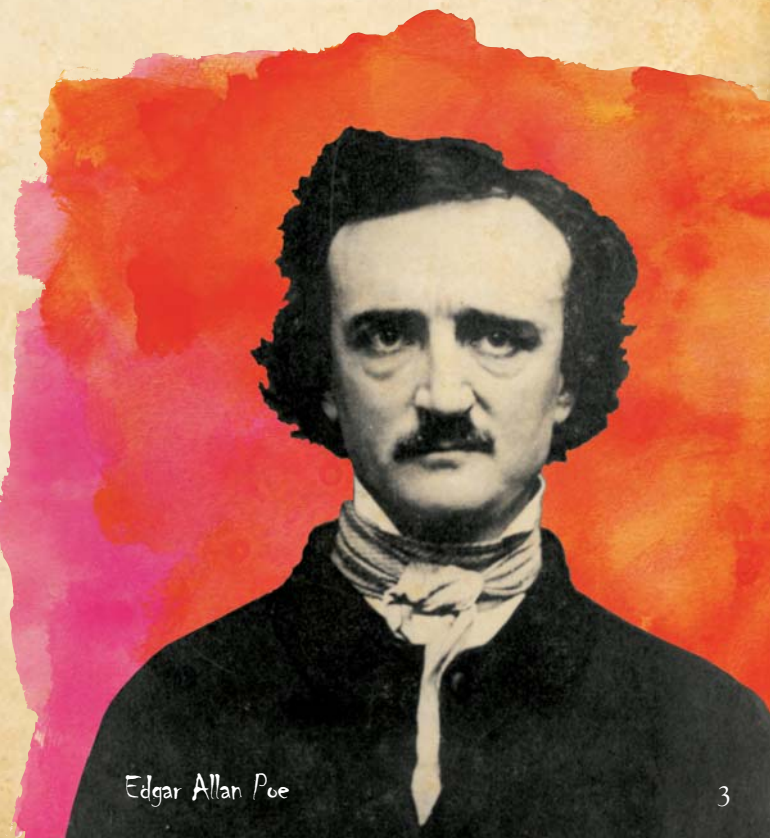
The Life of Edgar Allan Poe

Born to David and Elizabeth Arnold Poe, traveling actors, Edgar Poe was orphaned before he was three and taken in by John and Frances Allan, a merchant family in Richmond. Poe entered the University of Virginia, Schools of Ancient and Modern Languages in 1826. His talent as a writer was evident even at an early age. Mr. Allan at first encouraged his fine talent. However, his foster-father's indiscretions sparked severe arguments between them. Edgar left the Allan household in 1827 to seek his fortune as a writer. Their differences were never resolved and, upon his death in 1834, John Allan remembered all his illegitimate children in his will, but left nothing to Edgar.

In 1836 Poe married his first cousin, Virginia, and embarked on a career as a journalist. Poe worked diligently as a book reviewer and as a magazine editor in Richmond, Philadelphia and New York to make his living. Battling poverty, illness, and the publishers' penchant for printing undeserved praise for inferior works written by their friends, Poe became the leading literary critic of his time. All the while, he struggled against the temptation of alcohol, a common social pastime. Duels were sometimes fought when a man refused to drink with his friends or enemies. On his own, he invented the literary genres of science fiction, the detective story and the modern horror story. Though he wrote many works of fiction, Poe considered himself a poet and described "The Raven" as the most perfectly constructed poem ever written.

While writing "The Raven," Poe's wife Virginia was slowly dying. Throughout his life, Poe's grief over the death of several women inspired his writing. He often spoke of his mother who died when he was just two years old. He mourned the loss of Jane Stanard, the mother of one of his playmates and "the first purely ideal love" of his soul who died when he was 15, and John Allan did not give him the opportunity to visit Frances Allan, his foster mother, before she died when he was 20.

Poe's life ended in Baltimore. On his way from Richmond to New York, he stopped in Baltimore, visited with friends and likely became the victim of an election practice known as "cooping." On October 3, 1849, the local election brought out gangs from opposing political parties, the Whigs and the Democrats. These gangs abducted foreigners and drunkards, cooped them in cellars, drugged them with alcohol and laudanum and forced them to vote repeatedly for the same candidate until they were unable to walk. Poe's longstanding alcoholic intolerance coupled with years of poverty may finally have taken the life of the author revered by literary scholars as well as those who simply enjoy a good horror story – the master of mystery and the macabre, Edgar Allan Poe.



Edgar Allan Poe

Description of the one-person show art form:

Sometimes called “solo performance,” this art form became popular with Hal Holbrook’s biographical one-man show “Mark Twain Tonight!” and Julie Harris’s “The Belle of Amherst.” Nowadays, solo performers play dozens of characters within a story in the manner of Gerald Charles Dickens’s and Patrick Stewart’s “A Christmas Carol.”



The show will not be presented exactly as Poe himself delivered his lecture-recitals. Poe recited poetry and shared his thoughts and opinions on the subject of poetry, critiquing the popular authors of the day. He never read or performed his stories for an audience, but he did recite his poem “The Raven” to the crowds who came to hear him speak.

In this performance, the actor uses Poe’s own words to speak directly to the audience and then, without reading the story (it is edited, then memorized and staged for dramatic effect), he becomes the narrator of the stories and, by changing his voice and posture, becomes all of the other characters in the stories. In “The Spectacles,” the actor will present the story as a first-person narrator and in “Hop-Frog,” as a third-person narrator.

After watching this biographical one-man show, the students will feel that they have been in the presence of the famous 19th century American writer, Edgar Allan Poe.

Synopses of Poe's works being performed:

Summary and cast of characters for "The Spectacles" (1844):

Napoleon Bonaparte Froissart, a wealthy and handsome young man, who happens to be very vain, has only one physical defect – his eyes are weak. Yet because of his vanity he refuses to wear glasses (for he feels that “nothing so disfigures the countenance of a young person”). At the opera with his friend Talbot, he falls in love with a beautiful woman, Eugenie Lalande, and writes her a long love letter. She agrees to meet him and he proposes to marry her. She accepts his proposal on the condition that he wears glasses after they are married. They elope and after the wedding he fulfills his promise and puts on glasses. He then sees his bride for the first time as she really is – wrinkled, rouged and toothless. He has married his great-great-grandmother.

Summary and cast of characters for "Hop-Frog" (1849):

Hop-Frog, a court jester who happens to be also a dwarf and a cripple, is summoned to the court of the King. Because Hop-Frog is very talented in the way of “getting up pageants, suggesting novel characters and arranging costumes for masqued balls,” the King asks Hop-Frog to create some “characters” for himself and his seven ministers. The King torments Hop-Frog by forcing him to drink wine “for it excited the poor cripple to madness, and madness is no comfortable feeling.” Hop-Frog has a friend at court, a young girl named Trippetta who is a marvelous dancer. After the King throws wine in Trippetta’s face, Hop-Frog is inspired to provide the King and his seven ministers with costumes as “The Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs.” The costumes are made of highly flammable materials and Hop-Frog gets his revenge by burning them with a torch while they swing in their chains from the center of the ballroom.

Summary and cast of characters for "The Raven" (1845):

The narrator is a gentleman mourning the death of a beautiful woman. He believes that if he occupies his mind by reading (“to borrow from my books surcease of sorrow”), he will be able to overcome his grief. He is visited, however, at midnight by a raven, a symbol of grief (“a grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore”). The raven alights upon a bust of Pallas, the goddess of wisdom, and the narrator questions the raven about the possibility of seeing his beloved again in heaven. The raven answers each question with ‘Nevermore’ and drives the narrator into despair: “And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor, shall be lifted nevermore.”



Synopses of some of Poe's other works not being performed:

The Fall of the House of Usher (1839):

The narrator responds to a letter from his friend Roderick Usher by visiting him in his large and decaying house. They bury Roderick's sister Madeline in the cellar but she is still alive.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841):

Two women are killed in a savage way. The narrator visits the scene of the crime and rationally discovers the identity of the killer.

The Masque of the Red Death (1842):

Prince Prospero invites his friends into his castle and holds a masquerade while the Plague rages outside. The Prince attempts to kill a masquerader who inhabits the costume of Death.

The Pit and the Pendulum (1842):

During the Inquisition, the narrator is taken to a special dungeon and tortured because he holds beliefs contrary to those of strict Roman Catholicism. The narrator systematically plots to escape from the slow-moving descent of a pendulum.

The Tell-Tale Heart (1843):

The narrator is driven to insanity by the repulsive sight of an old man's eye and kills him. While the police question him, the narrator hallucinates hearing the sound of the old man's heart beating beneath the floorboards and admits the deed.

The Black Cat (1843):

The narrator is a drunkard so dominated by perverse impulses that he hangs a black cat which he had once loved. Later he murders his wife and walls up the corpse in the cellar. While the police are in the cellar, the cat screams out from behind the wall and the police discover his wife's corpse.

The Cask of Amontillado (1846):

Montresor, the narrator of the story, tricks Fortunato, a fellow wine connoisseur, into following him home to taste some Amontillado. After leading Fortunato down into the vaults where his wine is stored, Montresor walls up Fortunato still alive.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary for "The Spectacles"

1. **Froissart** Chronicles (French chronicler and poet, noted for his vivid history of Europe from 1325 to 1400)
2. **Prima donna** (the leading woman soloist in an opera company)
3. **Miniature** (a small painting executed with great detail, often on a surface such as ivory or vellum)
4. **Mon cheri** (French for 'my dear')
5. **Making open love** (In Poe's time this meant flirting, not as it means today, sexual activities between two people.)

Vocabulary for "Hop-Frog"

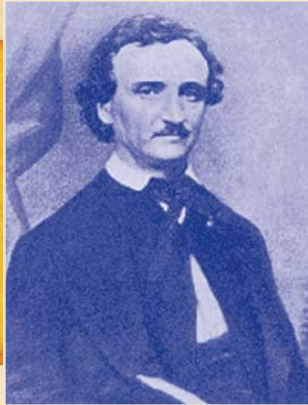
1. **Ourang-outang** (An arboreal anthropoid ape which inhabits Borneo and Sumatra, it is now an endangered species. In Poe's time it was known to be the largest ape and most dangerous animal in the world. No one had yet seen a gorilla.)
2. **Flax** (a widely cultivated plant having pale blue flowers, seeds that yield linseed oil, and slender stems from which a textile fiber is obtained)
3. **Cupola** (a domelike structure surmounting a roof or dome, often used as a lookout or to admit light and air)
4. **Caryatids** (a supporting column sculptured in the form of a draped female figure)

Vocabulary for "The Raven"

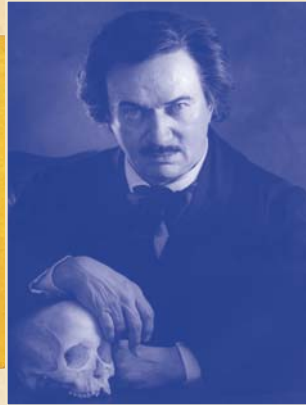
1. **Surcease** of sorrow (to bring an end to the narrator's grief)
2. **Obeisance** (a gesture or movement of the body, such as a curtsy, that expresses deference or homage)
3. **Censer** swung by **seraphim** (A vessel in which incense is burned, especially during religious services, swung by the first of the nine orders of angels.)
4. **Quaff** this kind **nepenthe** (to drink heartily a drug mentioned in the Odyssey as a remedy for grief)
5. **Balm in Gilead** (Balm is an aromatic gum resin obtained from several trees and shrubs of India, Arabia, and eastern Africa, used in perfume and incense. Also called balm of Gilead. Gilead is a mountainous region of ancient Palestine east of the Jordan River in what is now northwest Jordan.)
6. **Aiden** (Poe's spelling of Arabic Aden meaning heaven or a form of Eden)

Suggested Activities for Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe



David Keltz



Consider using one or more of the following activities to prepare them for Mr. Keltz's performance. Naturally, you will want to adapt these ideas to fit the levels and abilities of your students.

Suggested Activities:

1. To access students' prior knowledge of Edgar Allan Poe and his works, consider using a *Know - Want to Know - Learned* activity. Have students either use a K-W-L chart or do a quick write to list what they already know or think they know about Poe or his stories and poems. Hold a class discussion to share their prior knowledge and ask if there are questions they would like answered. Provide students with a short biography of Poe that includes synopses of some of his more famous works and direct students to read the biography to find the answers to their questions. End with a discussion of what students have learned. (See handout provided.)

www.eapoe.org

www.poestories.com

<http://knowingpoe.thinkport.org>

www.poemuseum.org/life-timeline.php

Suggested Activities for "The Spectacles"

Many people believe that Poe only wrote dark or horrific tales. "The Spectacles" challenges that belief. Here Poe explores the classic admonition carved into the temple at Delphi - "know thyself" - in this comedic story of vanity and mistaken identity. Poe also writes dialogue in a French accent for his female antagonist.

Suggested Activities:

1. To encourage students to consider how one's self-image either helps or hinders in accomplishing any goal, have them list in two columns titled "positive" and "negative" the adjectives and behaviors that describe the various positive and negative qualities of their friends and family. Have them do a quick write on how constructive criticism differs from petty or humiliating criticism.
2. To prepare the students to hear dialogue delivered in a foreign accent, have them list the languages they have heard in school this year. Then have them do a quick write about a foreign country they would or would not like to visit.
3. To explore the variety of ways in which we remember those we love, have the students make a list of tokens of affection or keepsakes they received from friends and family on their birthdays, at holidays and other special days. Have them do a journal entry about how they decided what to give a friend on a special day.



Suggested Activities for "Hop-Frog"

Bullying behavior is taken seriously in this tale about a deformed court jester and a king. The power struggle between these two men escalates to horror when the king's seven ministers fail to criticize the king for his abuse of Hop-Frog.

Suggested Activities:

1. To prepare the students to hear this powerful story of social and physical inequality, have them do a journal entry about how they felt when they witnessed bullying behavior either in their own lives or on television or in movies.
2. To stir the students' imaginations in considering what behavior distinguishes animals from human beings, have them do a quick write about how they reacted when they were frightened by an animal.



Suggested Activities for "The Raven"

Students may already have preconceived notions of what "The Raven" is about. They may assume that it is a scary story like "The Tell-Tale Heart" or some of Poe's other horror stories. In fact, "The Raven" is a poem about grief.

Throughout his life, Poe grieved over the death of several women: his mother who died when he was two years old; the first ideal love of his life, Jane Stanard, the mother of one of his playmates who died when he was 15; and his foster mother who died when he was 20. While writing "The Raven," Poe's wife Virginia was slowly dying. Perhaps he was thinking of her as he wrote a poem that expresses the kind of grief that makes a person feel as if they will never be happy again.

1. To prepare students for listening to "The Raven," have them do a quick write or journal entry on the topic, "A time when I lost someone or something that I cared deeply about." Once students have had ample time to write, allow volunteers to share what they've written and hold a class discussion to determine how people express grief. Explain that writers may use poetry as a way to explore their feelings and to try to capture in words what grief feels like and use that as an introduction to a reading of the poem they will hear Mr. Keltz perform. (This might be an excellent opportunity to review or make connections with whatever curriculum materials you may have used or plan to use related to poetry, poetic elements or devices, literature about death or grief, etc.)
2. To help students understand the poem, "The Raven," give them a copy of the poem and complete a text rendering activity with them. For information about "The Raven" and text rendering visit the following web sites:

www.eapoe.org/works/poems/ravena.htm

<http://web001.greece.k12.ny.us/academics.cfm?subpage=921>



Writers of this Study Guide:



David Keltz began playing Edgar Allan Poe in 1991 at Poe's grave at Halloween and has played Poe for the World's Largest Poe Birthday Celebration in Baltimore eight times since 1993. In 1999 he opened the International Poe Festival in Prague, Czech Republic at the Rudolfinum Concert Hall with "The Bells" and played Poe at the Na Zbradlie among other theatres. Keltz holds a B.A. in Theatre from Florida Atlantic University, studied at the Lee Strasberg Institute in New York, and continues to study Lessac Kinesensic Training with Nancy Krebs. Keltz is a long-time member of Screen Actors Guild.

Keltz offers teachers and students this study guide with a focus on "The Raven" and two of Poe's lesser-known stories, "The Spectacles" and "Hop-Frog." Because Keltz performs so often for the same audiences, he looked for other horror stories besides those he had been performing for years - "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Cask of Amontillado." He found another horror story, one that was set in mediaeval times, one which lent itself to dramatic performance and had a variety of characters within it - that story is "Hop-Frog." Then, after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, when schools and theatre audiences were overwhelmed by the horror of reality, Keltz researched Poe's body of work and found the antithesis of horror in Poe's romantic comedy "The Spectacles."

Teresa Herold was a script reader and assistant to Elinor Fuchs at Chelsea Westside Theatre and an assistant to Joanna Merlin in the office of Harold Prince while in New York. Now a writer-producer with David Keltz in his one-man shows, she graduated in 2008 from The Commercial Theater Institute of The Broadway League. She earned a B.A. in Music from the University of Maryland at College Park, studied at Warren Robertson's Theatre Workshop, and is a past Board member and President of Women in Film and Video of Maryland.

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