

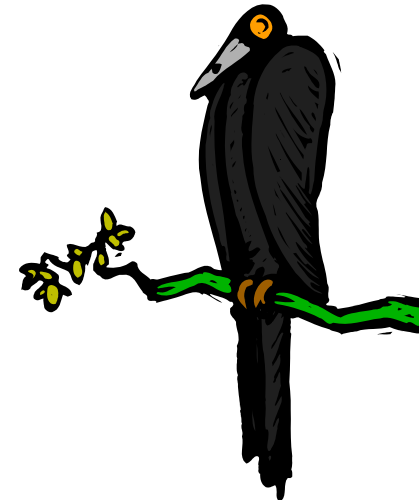
Introducing 'The Raven'

'The Raven' is arguably Edgar Allen Poe's most famous piece of writing, and one of the best early examples of 'gothic literature' – the precursor of the modern horror genre. 'The Raven' is a gothic poem that was first published in 1845. Its language can be difficult to understand at times, so you have been provided with the following summary of the poem's narrative to help guide your reading, and a glossary of terms appears after the poem.

Summary of 'The Raven':

The unnamed narrator is wearily reading an old book one bleak December night when he hears a tapping at the door to his room. He tells himself that it is merely a visitor. He is waiting for tomorrow to arrive because he cannot escape his sorrow over the death of Lenore, a woman who he had loved. The rustling curtains frighten him, but he decides that it must be some late visitor and, going to the door, he asks for forgiveness from the visitor because he had been napping. However, when he opens the door, he sees and hears nothing except the word "Lenore," an echo of his own words.

Returning to his room, he again hears a tapping and reasons that it was probably the wind outside his window. When he opens the window, however, a raven enters and promptly perches "upon a bust of Pallas" above his door. Its grave appearance amuses the narrator, who asks it for its names. The raven responds, "Nevermore." The narrator does not understand the reply, but the raven says nothing else until the



narrator predicts aloud that it will leave him tomorrow like the rest of his friends. Then the bird again says, "Nevermore."

Startled, the narrator says that the raven must have learned this word from some unfortunate owner whose bad luck caused him to repeat the word frequently. Smiling, the narrator sits in front of the ominous raven to ponder about the meaning of its word. The raven continues to stare at him, as the narrator sits in the chair that Lenore will never again occupy.

The narrator then feels that angels have approached, and angrily calls the raven an evil prophet. He asks if there is respite in "Gilead" and if he will again see Lenore in Heaven, but the raven only responds, "Nevermore." In a fury, the narrator demands that the raven go back into the night and leave him alone again, but the raven says, "Nevermore," and it does not leave the bust of Pallas. The narrator feels that his soul will "nevermore" leave the raven's shadow.



THE RAVEN

BY EDGAR ALLEN 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 named 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 visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door -
Some late visitor 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 mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness 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 thence 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 this 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 above the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as 'Nevermore.'

But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only,
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing further 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!

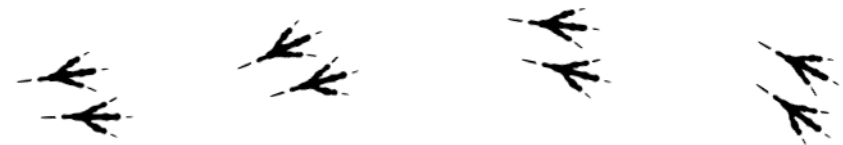
Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
`Wretch,' I cried, `thy God hath lent thee - by these angels he has sent the
Respite - respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, 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 named Lenore -
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels named 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 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;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted - nevermore!



'The Raven' by Edgar Allan Poe: Glossary

This poem was written in 1845. Some of the words used are not as commonly used today. Many of the words you might not fully understand are explained below. Use a dictionary to look up the meaning of any other words you come across in the poem if you are not 100% sure of the meaning. The words are listed in the order you will find them in the poem.

1. lore = wisdom or knowledge
2. chamber = large room used for meeting people
3. wrought = shaped or formed
4. surcease = relief from / a brief release from
5. entreating = strongly requesting / begging
6. mortal = human / earthly
7. lattice = web/net-like pattern/ trellis
8. obeisance = bow or genuflect
9. mien = appearance or expression
10. bust = life-sized statute of a persons head and shoulders
11. Pallas = Greek God of wisdom and the Arts
12. beguiling = charmed/fascinated
13. decorum = respectability / good manners
14. countenance = face/ expression
15. craven = coward/ gutless
16. Plutonian = Black/ Pluto was Roman god of the underworld
17. discourse = communication/ conversation

18. placid = easy-going/ calm
19. ...only stock and store.. = only thing he has got
20. dirges = funeral song
21. melancholy = sad and gloomy
22. ominous = warning/threatening
23. censer = ghost
24. seraphim = angels of the highest order
25. nepenthe = drug that makes you unconscious
26. Tempter = The Devil
27. ... balm in Gilead .. = medicine to relieve pain and suffering
28. Aidenn = Like Eden/ meaning - in heaven
29. plume = feather
30. pallid = white/ pale/ colourless



DISSECTING *THE RAVEN*

TASK ONE: GOOD AND EVIL

Poe's poem explores the dichotomy between good (symbolised through the memory of Lenore) and evil (shown through the devilry of the Raven). Draw a chart with two columns, with Lenore on the top of one side, and The Raven on the top of the other. Read through the poem again, and list under Lenore as many words as you can which have positive meanings, and under the Raven all words used with negative meanings.

TASK TWO: THE TOOLS OF A MASTER

Poe has used many different literary techniques in order to create the ominous and unnerving atmosphere that has made *The Raven* so famous. Try to find at least one other example of each of the following techniques:

- **Alliteration:** When the same consonant is used at the beginning of a series of words creating a regular sound-pattern ('**D**oubting, **d**reaming **d**reams no mortal ever **d**ared...')
- **Assonance:** When the vowel-sound in a series of words is repeated, creating a pattern of sound ('the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name...')
- **Rhyme:** The pattern created when the sound of the final word in two or more lines of poetry is the same ('...its only stock and store... ...till his songs one burden bore-')

- **Onomatopoeia:** When the way a word sounds imitates the sound of the object it describes (tapping, rapping, rustling, flutter, croaking)
- **Personification:** When a poet writes about something that is obviously not human as though it were a person. ('the... sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain')

TASK THREE: SUMMARISE A GOTHIC CLASSIC

Write one short sentence to summarise the events in each stanza. There should be 18 sentences in total. The first one has been done for you below.

1. *I was napping when I heard knocking at my door.*

Alternatively, you can create a storyboard through drawing one picture for each stanza, linking them together.

TASK FOUR: MODERNISE A GOTHIC CLASSIC

Rewrite one stanza of *The Raven* using modern English, as if it was part of a short story. Your aim should be to create a scary atmosphere through the use of descriptive language and the literary techniques discussed above.

