

Nevermore:

The Final Nightmares of Edgar Allan Poe



a study guide

**compiled and arranged by
the Education Department of
The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey**

The
SHAKESPEARE
Theatre of
New Jersey

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's

Shakespeare LIVE!

2008 educational touring production

Nevermore: The Final Nightmares of Edgar Allan Poe
a study guide

a support packet for studying the play
and attending The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's **Shakespeare LIVE!** touring production

General Information

- p3- Using this Study Guide
- p13- Sources for this Study Guide

Edgar Allan Poe and his Times

- p4- A Brief Biography of Edgar Allan Poe
- p5- The Mysterious Death of E.A. Poe
- p6- Mental Illness and Treatment in the 1800s
- p10- Poe's Times: Chronology

Nevermore and Poe's Writings

- p7- *Nevermore*: A Brief Synopsis
- p8- Commentary and Criticism
- p9- *Nevermore*: Food For Thought

Classroom Applications

- p10- Terms and Phrases found in *Nevermore*
- p11- Additional Topics for Discussion
- p11- Follow-Up Activities
- p12- "Test Your Understanding" Quiz
- p13- Meeting The Core Curriculum Standards
- p13- "Test Your Understanding" Answer Key

About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

- p14- About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey
- p14- Other Opportunities for Students... and Teachers



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CLASSROOM

FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS



ACTIVITIES

Since Artistic Director Bonnie J. Monte assumed leadership of the organization in 1990, the principal goals of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey’s Education Programs have been to demystify Shakespeare, take him “off the shelf” and re-energize his work for students and teachers alike. In this, the second decade of our *Shakespeare LIVE!* educational touring company, we resolved to go “beyond the Bard,” as we have long done on our Main Stage, creating an energized and accessible pathway for students to experience other literary classics. Towards these goals, this Study Guide provides educators with tools to enrich their teaching and to expand the *Shakespeare LIVE!* experience for their students beyond the hour spent watching the production.

The information included in the study guide and activity book will help you expand your students’ understanding of the stories and poems of Edgar Allan Poe, as well as help you meet many of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. We encourage you to impart as much of the information included in this study guide to your students as is possible. The following are some suggestions on how you can utilize elements of the study guide given limited classroom time.

Many teachers have found that distributing or reading the one-page “BRIEF SYNOPSIS” has greatly increased students’ understanding and enjoyment of the production. It provides the students with a general understanding of what they will be seeing and what they can expect. Some teachers have simply taken the last ten minutes of a class period to do this with very positive results.

When more class time is available prior to seeing the play, we recommend incorporating the background information on Poe’s work and times. For another production, one teacher divided her class into groups and assigned each group research topics based on the divisions found in the study guide. Using a copy of the corresponding study-guide page as a launch pad, the students had one week to research the topics. The students then presented their information to the class in three- to five-minute oral reports. Including the questions that evolved from the presentations, the entire project took only one class period.

Using the questions found in the “TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION,” many teachers will opt to take a class period after the presentation to discuss the play with their students. The questions help keep the comments focused on the production, while incorporating various thematic issues that are found in the play.

One school spent two days working through performance-based activities (a few of which are suggested in the “FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES” section) with a particularly “difficult and rowdy” class. They were astounded with the results. Their students took the opportunity to “ham it up,” and discovered a great joy and understanding from performing classic literature.

“What’s My Line?” Promoting Active Listening

Teacher-tested, student-approved! Try this exercise with your students:

Before attending the production, give each student one line from the poems included in the play to listen for. Discuss the meaning of the line and encourage their input in deciphering what Poe meant by the line. How would the student perform the line? Why is the line important to the play? Does it advance the plot, or give the audience particular insight into an aspect of its author’s life?

Following the production, discuss the line again. Did the actor present the line in the way your student expected? If not, how was it different?

Several schools have brought members of the *Shakespeare LIVE!* company and the Theatre’s education staff into their classrooms to run workshops, either on school time or after school. Workshop topics include Text in Performance and Stage Combat, but we are also happy to design a workshop to meet your needs.

To learn more about these and many other suggestions for engaging your students, I encourage you to join us this summer for our acclaimed summer professional development institute for teachers, *ShakeFest*. Again, we hope you will incorporate as many portions of this study guide as you are able into your classroom experience. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not already found in the study guide, please contact our education department. We are always interested in hearing new ways to excite young people (and teachers) about the classics and live theatre.

Happy Teaching,

Brian B. Crowe, Director of Education

A Brief Biography of Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts on January 19th, 1809 to the touring actors Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins and David Poe, the second of three children born to this brief marriage. Little is known about David Poe except for his reputation for heavy drinking and erratic behavior. In December 1811, Elizabeth Poe died following an illness in Richmond, Virginia. Either shortly before or after his wife's death, David Poe abandoned the family, leaving his three young children effectively orphaned.

All three were taken in by different foster families, Edgar by John Allan, a wealthy Richmond tobacco merchant, and his wife Frances. Mrs. Allan had longed for a child, and proved to be a doting mother to young Edgar, even as her husband was a somewhat stern and severe father. Still, he had Edgar rebaptized Edgar Allan Poe, and provided the

boy with a first-rate education, first in England, where the family lived from 1815-20, then again in Richmond. The highly imaginative Edgar was often at the top of his class, especially in literature, languages and art. He was also an excellent athlete, making a six mile swim against the current of the James River at age 15.

At age 17, Edgar enrolled at the University of Virginia, recently founded by Thomas Jefferson, where as a freshman he studied Latin and poetry, and did some acting as well. Edgar had a difficult time adjusting to the independence of college life. Mr. Allan provided him with very little money on which to maintain the lifestyle of a young Southern gentleman. Although Edgar did very well in his courses, he was far less successful at his classmates' major pastime, gambling. Having lost the little money he had, his continued attempts to recoup it only threw him further into debt. As his difficulties mounted, Poe began to turn to alcohol to escape the pressures on him.

When Poe's debts were revealed, a furious Allan cut off the boy's funds, removed him from the university and forced him to return to Richmond. Tensions between Edgar and John Allan came to a head as Frances Allan lay dying of tuberculosis, no longer able to protect her foster son. Poe had been courting his childhood sweetheart, Sarah Elmyra Royster, but his debts and drinking had become public knowledge, and the girl's parents insisted that she marry someone more suitable.

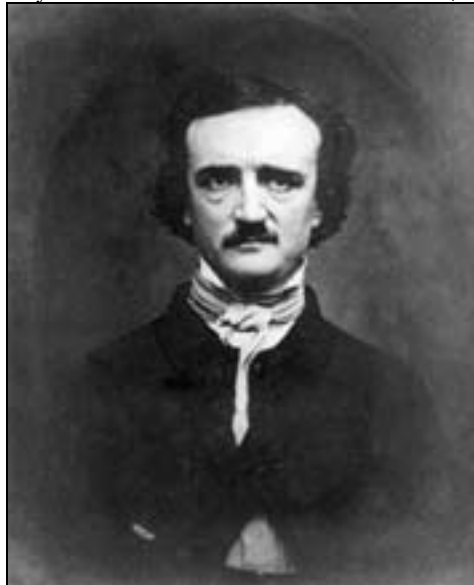
Devastated and fleeing his creditors, Poe moved to Boston, where in 1827 he anonymously published his first and now-rare book of poetry, a thin pamphlet entitled *Tamerlane and Other Poems*. Shortly thereafter, Poe joined the U.S. Army under the pseudonym Edgar A Perry. In just a year and half, he rose to Sergeant-Major, the highest possible non-commissioned rank.

Having been honorably discharged in April 1829, Poe moved to Baltimore to live with his aunt, Maria Poe Clemm, her 7-year-old daughter Virginia, and his own brother William Henry Poe, who was then himself dying of tuberculosis at age 22. That year he published his second book of poetry, *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane,*

and Minor Poems.

In 1830, Poe received an appointment from the U.S. military to attend West Point; but within months he became disillusioned with the rigid academy, and got himself dismissed in March 1831, returning to his aunt's home and devoting himself to his writing.

In 1834, John Allan died, leaving bequests even to his illegitimate children, but making no mention of Edgar. Meanwhile, however, Poe was having his stories and poems published in several magazines, and was slowly approaching financial stability. In 1835, he was hired as an associate editor of Richmond's *Southern Literary Messenger*. With the departure of his cousin Henry Clemm to sea, Poe's aunt and cousin Virginia were left without a male breadwinner. In 1836, Poe brought Virginia and his aunt to Richmond, where he married Virginia (then 13), ensuring that both women would have a more secure living situation.



Edgar Allan Poe in 1848.

Over the next several years, Poe and his family moved between Richmond, New York and Philadelphia as he tried to establish his literary and editorial career with a major magazine. Between the years of 1839 and 1841, Edgar was published by *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, *Graham's Magazine*, *Godey's Lady's Book*, and the *Evening Mirror*. One of his most renowned stories, "The Fall of the House of Usher", was released in the book *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* in 1840; the following year, what is now hailed as the first modern detective story, "Murders in the Rue Morgue", was published. Between 1842 and 1844, when Edgar and Virginia officially settled in New York City, stories such as "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" were published. In 1845 Edgar received international acclaim with the release of *The Raven and Other Poems*.

His success was overshadowed, however, by further personal tragedy. In 1842, Virginia ruptured a blood vessel while singing, an early sign that she too was succumbing to tuberculosis. As her bouts of illness increased, Poe again turned to alcohol for relief. Despite his growing acclaim, the couple's financial situation was still precarious. In the era before copyright and royalties, even "The Raven" earned Poe just 14 dollars. Poe frequently found himself unable even to keep their cottage heated.

In January 1847, Virginia died at home, with Edgar at her bedside. Alone again, Poe succumbed fully to his alcoholism and depression—drinking far more often and falling into a completely altered state with even the smallest amount of alcohol. In little more than two years, he would die in Baltimore under mysterious circumstances (see next page).

Often considered something of a curiosity in his own time, today Edgar Allan Poe is accounted one of the greatest American writers, and a father of three new genres: horror, science fiction and the murder mystery. In his own life, he earned wide admiration and acclaim from his literary peers around the world, including Dostoyevsky, Baudelaire, Walt Whitman, Charles Dickens and many others.

The Mysterious Death of E. A. Poe

On October 3rd, 1849, Poe's old friend Dr. Joseph E. Snodgrass, was handed an urgent and cryptic note:

Dear Sir, There is a gentleman, rather the worse for wear, at Ryan's 4th ward polls, who goes under the cognomen of Edgar A. Poe, and who appears in great distress, & he says he is acquainted with you, & I assure you, he is in need of immediate assistance.

Yours, in haste,

JOS. W. WALKER

The father of the modern murder mystery left the world one last mystery: the mystery of his death. After being found unconscious in front of Ryan's Tavern in downtown Baltimore, Poe was taken to Washington College Hospital, where he was attended by Dr. John Moran. Over the next few days, Poe slipped in and out of varied states of consciousness and coherence, with much of his energy directed, in Moran's description, toward "a vacant converse with spectral and imaginary objects on the walls." Moran believed that Poe's delirium and confusion was a result of the chronic alcoholism to which he had succumbed after the death of his wife, Virginia, in 1847. Although Moran eventually listed Poe's cause of death as "congestion of the brain," he wrote to Poe's aunt, Maria Clemm, that she "was already aware of the malady of which Mr. Poe died."

After three days of alternating between unconsciousness and violent, terror-stricken delirium, on the fourth night Poe awoke and began calling for "Reynolds"—although it is unclear who he might have been referring to. According to Moran, after several hours of crying out in this fashion, Poe's agitation subsided, and murmuring, "Lord help my poor soul," he died.

The symptoms and circumstances of Poe's death defied easy explanation, and even Moran vacillated throughout his lifetime on his initial diagnosis of advanced alcoholism. Earlier in 1849, Poe had written to his aunt saying that he had been sick with cholera, or something similar, and that he knew he was going to die very soon. One of his nurses in Baltimore later said that she saw a scar on his left shoulder. When she asked him if he had been injured he said yes, and also that his head hurt. It has been speculated that with his recent illness and possible injuries had left him in a fragile state, possibly with a lingering infection.

The odd circumstances of Poe's discovery, including the fact that he had been completely re-dressed in shabby clothes that were not his own, have led some to speculate that Poe was, in fact, murdered. He was found in front of Ryan's Tavern on election day, and a popular — although illegal — practice of the time was *cooping*: the attempt to swing an election to a particular candidate by kidnapping men off the streets, forcing them to consume large quantities of alcohol and/or drugs, and then leading them to vote repeatedly under false names (often changing their clothes between votes to throw off the poll workers). However, other than Poe's clothing, no evidence of his having been cooped has ever come to light, and Poe would have been an unusual victim for this crime, which was usually perpetrated on poor immigrants rather than relatively well-



Illustration of "The Cask of Amontillado" by Harry Clark, 1919.

known authors with many friends in the community.

A still more sinister and outlandish theory holds that Poe was drugged and beaten to death by the brothers of Poe's childhood sweetheart, the widow Sarah Elmyra Shelton, whom he had recently been wooing in Richmond. Again, however, there is little evidence in the contemporary accounts that Poe had recently been beaten, or that external brain trauma played in any part in his final days.

In the intervening decades, physicians have proposed diabetes, hypoglycemia, epilepsy, carbon monoxide poisoning and enzyme deficiencies as possible explanations for Poe's symptoms. In 1996, a University of Maryland medical research team examined Poe's hospital records and offered up a diagnosis of rabies. According to their theory, Poe, a cat lover, may have been bitten by one of his pets and contracted the disease prior to his trip to Richmond. According to the Maryland researchers, the swings in body temperature and pulse rate, as well as the episodes of delirium, paranoia and terror alternating with unconsciousness, would all be typical of end-stage rabies. It has been objected that Poe did not display hydrophobia, the difficulty in swallowing which is a classic symptom of the disease, but some studies have found as many as 25% of rabies patients presenting neurological symptoms like Poe's without the accompanying hydrophobia.

There are many theories and no definite agreement on what caused Poe's untimely death. Undoubtedly the master of the macabre would have been delighted that his own story ended in a gruesome, unsolved mystery.

Mental Illness and Treatment in the 1800s

While medical science was advancing rapidly in the United States during Poe's lifetime, mental disorders remained essentially unexplored and taboo territory. Only a few decades before, early American colonists allocated the blame for unusual or erratic behavior to witchcraft and other supernatural causes. Those who were affected by demons or were suspected of practicing witchcraft were, at best, sent into prisons or almshouses for the rest of their lives. If mental illness affected a wealthy family, efforts were usually made to cover this up by keeping the person in seclusion at home.



This 1735 engraving by William Hogarth depicts the questionable standards for mental health “care” in Poe’s era. It depicts Bedlam Hospital, London’s most famous (or infamous) lunatic asylum.

The 19th century saw the beginning of psychiatry, as progressive doctors and researchers began speculating that behavior could have physical causes stemming from the function of the brain. The term “neurosis” was coined in 1800 by the Irish physician William Cullen, who influenced the French psychiatrist Philippe Pinel. Pinel further classified neurosis, or mental illness, into four distinct categories of “mania,” “melancholia,” “dementia,” and “idiocy.”

In the 1820s, Thomas Brown popularized the concept of studying the mind as a science, arguing that that psychology was the “common center [of] every speculation, in every science.” This interest in the peculiarities and inner functions of the individual mind spilled over into literature, where Romantics like Byron, Mary Shelley and others explored the perspectives of deranged and disturbed individuals, in turn influencing American authors such as Melville and Poe.

Poe was avidly interested in the growth of psychology— he read George Combe’s *Lectures on Phrenology* — a popular study of the brain at that time — as he wrote *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

Certainly many of his stories and poems feature characters who would be described as delusional.

It is likely that Poe himself suffered throughout much of his life from clinical depression, a disease which was only partially understood in the form of Pinel’s “melancholia.” Like many sufferers from depression, Poe was recognized to be emotionally hypersensitive since childhood. His letters frequently reference loneliness, thoughts of his own death, and “melancholy” or a “depression of spirits” that would interfere with his ability to work. His abuse of alcohol, and particularly his descriptions of his drinking, suggest that he was more or less consciously drinking to self-medicate, even if the mechanism of this self-medication would not be fully understood for almost a century. “It has been in a desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories, from a sense of insupportable loneliness, and a dread of some strange impending doom,” he wrote towards the end of his life.

Following the death of his wife Virginia, Poe almost certainly suffered a major depressive episode, becoming at times “totally deranged,” as he wrote in a letter to his aunt. In addition to alcohol, Poe had likely become a regular user of opium, in the form of the commonly available sedative and painkiller laudanum. In 1848, Poe nearly died from a laudanum overdose, which may have been a botched suicide attempt.

Unfortunately for Poe, in the 19th century even doctors thought of mental illness primarily as a woman’s disorder. “Hysteria” or “nervous prostration” were acceptable diagnoses for women, but men were expected to be able to control their emotions. Mental illness in men was generally considered to be rare and the result of a congenital defect or perversion. There was little or no way for a man to seek professional treatment for a mental condition, forcing sufferers like Poe to turn to alcohol and drugs for relief.

Nevermore: A Brief Synopsis

Edgar Allan Poe spent the final four days of his life as a patient in Baltimore's Washington College Hospital. He was found in a state of deep delirium and, during his stay in the hospital, was in and out of consciousness. While awake, he paid little attention to those in the room with him, and spoke to unseen beings he saw around him. Brian Crowe's play *Nevermore* uses these facts as a way to explore Poe's writings and tragic, shaping incidents from Poe's life. The "unseen beings" in this play take the form of masked demons, which guide Poe through some parallels between his life and art. The subjects include the early death of his child bride, Virginia Clemm; his doomed engagement to his childhood sweetheart Sarah Elmyra Royster; the precarious relationship with his foster father, John Allan; and the critics that called him a fraud and an erotomaniac. In *Nevermore*, Poe faces and attempts to conquer his demons, the "torturing memories" that threaten to consume his very soul.

Prologue/"Dreamland"

The barkeeper Walker writes to Poe's friend Snodgrass, summoning him to Baltimore, where he discovers Poe lying unconscious on a hospital bed. As the doctor attempts to communicate with him, Poe has a vision of demons rising around him. The Demons summon him with his poem "Dreamland," luring him into their realm. They bring forth a "mystic" book, and set the stage for the first of the stories, in which they assume the roles of Poe's characters.

"The Cask of Amontillado"

In the season of Carnival, Montresor, believing himself greatly insulted by Fortunato, has privately vowed to take revenge on this well-respected man. The key to Montresor's revenge, however, is to pretend to be Fortunato's friend up to the moment of his inevitable doom. Montresor meets an inebriated Fortunato on the street and tells him that he has just purchased a "pipe" or cask of Amontillado (a rare, expensive Spanish sherry), but fears that he may have been cheated in the sale. Fortunato, an expert in old wines, eagerly agrees to sample the Amontillado. Montresor tells Fortunato that he has placed the cask in his family's catacombs for safekeeping. As they journey through the winding tunnels, Montresor repeatedly entreats Fortunato to forget the Amontillado due to the severe cough with which Fortunato is afflicted. Fortunato refuses. Upon reaching an isolated portion of the catacombs, Montresor strikes Fortunato down and chains him to the wall of a tiny recess. He then proceeds to slowly wall Fortunato into the crypt, and leaves him there to die. Fifty years later, Montresor retells the story, recalling his crime in vivid detail.

"Annabel Lee"/"Lenore"/"The Bridal Ballad"

Poe calls out for his wife, and the demons taunt him with memories of Virginia, his aunt Maria Clemm, his sweetheart Sarah Elmyra Royster, and many absent and courted women that passed through Poe's life. They eventually shift his focus to the "perfect tragic bride" of Poe's imagination, Lenore. As they recite "Annabel Lee," they bring "Edgar" (an eerie shadow of Poe) and the dream-bride together in marriage, and then separate them eternally in death.

In "Lenore" two of the demons attending the funeral of the young bride, contest how her death should be acknowledged, mocking Edgar's devotion. Lenore, a ghost now, speaks the verses of "The Bridal Ballad" as Edgar dreams of her.

"The Raven"

Edgar awakes from his dream, and turns to a book for comfort, in which he reads arguably the most famous poem by Edgar Allan Poe, "The Raven." The poem chronicles one evening in which a widower sits alone on a bleak December night. As he mourns the loss of his true love, Lenore, he hears a knocking at his front door. When he opens it, no one is there. Shortly thereafter he hears a tapping at his window, and in flies a raven, which perches on a statue just above the doorway to the chamber. The man speaks often to the bird, but the bird only replies, enigmatically, "Nevermore." Years later, the bird remains, haunting the widower with what he has lost.

"A Dream Within A Dream"/"Alone"

Slightly more lucid than before, Poe is informed by the doctor of some of the details surrounding his situation. As his clarity begins to fade again, he describes how he has never been like others in "Alone." The Demons re-enter and taunt him with images of his foster father, John Allan.

"The Tell-Tale Heart"

Another tale of murder told in the first person, "The Tell-Tale Heart" follows the narrator's recount of the murder and dismemberment of his elderly boarder. The narrator who repeatedly insists on his sanity, states quite clearly that he loved the old man and that his reason for the killing was merely the vulture-like eye that the old man possessed.

In this version, the narrator is divided into two entities, the physical "Self" and the ethereal "Other" who prompts his actions. Self and Other recount how every night he would creep into the old man's bedchamber with great care. This continued for several nights, but the eye was closed, so he felt unable to commit the murder. On the eighth night, when he found the eye open, he killed the old man and placed his dismembered body beneath the floorboards of the room. When officers arrive to investigate a scream heard in the night, the man eagerly and confidently shows them around. However he begins to hear the old man's heart beating under the floorboards. The beating, unheard by the officers, grows in strength until the narrator, unable to endure the sound any longer, confesses the crime.

"Shadow- A Parable"/"The Conqueror Worm"/"A Dream Within a Dream"

Poe confronts the Demons one final time before his impending death.



Illustration of "The Raven" by Edouard Manet, 1889.

Commentary & Criticism

“His talents are of an order that can never prove a comfort to their possessor.”

John Allan (Poe’s foster father), 1833

“Mr. Poe is too fond of the wild — unnatural and horrible! Why will he not permit his fine genius to soar into purer, brighter, and happier regions? Why will he not disenthral himself from the spells of German enchantment and supernatural imagery? There is room enough for exercise of the highest powers, upon the multifarious relations of human life, without descending into the dark, mysterious and unutterable creations of licentious fancy.”

Richmond Compiler, 1836

“As a poet, Poe ranks high, although most of his poetry is unreadable. . . . The school of literature to which Poe belongs, and of which he is certainly the master, is one that we thoroughly dislike.”

Richard Henry Stoddard
The National Magazine,
March 1853

“I do not need to add, I presume, that American critics have often disparaged his poetry. . . . We are familiar with that kind of sparring. The reproaches that bad critics heap upon good poets are the same in all countries.”

Charles Baudelaire, 1857

“Poe’s judgments [in his literary criticism] are pretentious, spiteful, vulgar; but they contain a great deal of sense and discrimination as well, and here and there, sometimes at frequent intervals, we find a phrase of happy insight imbedded in a patch of fatuous pedantry.”

Henry James, 1879

“Poe’s verses illustrate an intense faculty for technical and abstract beauty, with the rhyming art to excess, an incorrigible propensity toward nocturnal themes, a demoniac undertone behind every page. . . . There is an indescribable magnetism about the poet’s life and reminiscences, as well as the poems.”

Walt Whitman, 1882

“To me his prose is unreadable — like Jane Austen’s.”

Mark Twain, 1909

“Above all, Poe is great because he is independent of cheap attractions, independent of sex, of patriotism, of fighting, of sentimentality, snobbery, gluttony, and all the rest of the vulgar stock-in-trade of his profession.”

George Bernard Shaw, 1909

“Where was the detective story until Poe breathed the breath of life into it?”

Arthur Conan Doyle, 1909

“Yet Poe is hardly an artist. He is rather a supreme scientist.”

D.H. Lawrence, 1919

“In him American literature is anchored, in him alone, on solid ground.”

William Carlos Williams, 1925

“To the most sensitive and high-souled man in the world we should find it hard to forgive, shall we say, the wearing of a diamond ring on every finger. Poe does the equivalent of this in his poetry.”

Aldous Huxley, 1930

“That Poe had a powerful intellect is undeniable: but it seems to me the intellect of a highly gifted person before puberty.”

T.S. Eliot, 1948

“It’s because I liked Edgar Allan Poe’s stories so much that I began to make suspense films.”

Alfred Hitchcock, 1960



Illustration of “The Raven” by John Tenniel, 1858.

Nevermore: Food For Thought

After-Dream of a Reveler

Opium, from which morphine is derived, is made from the seeds of a species of poppy plant (*papaver somniferum*). Opium usage can be traced as far back as the Sumerians in 5,000 BCE. The ancient Egyptians began using it as a sedative for colicky children. The *Ebers Papyrus*, the earliest recorded medicinal chart, which lists medical uses for opium, is dated back to 1550 BCE. From its roots in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), opium production was spread to other cultures throughout the world. Especially before its addictive qualities were recognized, it was one of medicine's most important pain-killers.

Recreational use of opium by smoking the poppy seeds, began in China in the 15th century, and spread to Western culture, where it was mixed with tobacco. Although the possibility of addiction had been recognized by this time, many still believed that this was a minor risk compared to its supposed health benefits. Only at the end of the 19th century, partly due to the stigmatization of Chinese immigrants in Europe and the U.S., did opium use become more generally associated with addiction and crime in the public imagination. Around the same time, opium was synthesized in laboratories into the far more potent and addictive heroin, which continues to be a commonly abused drug to this day.

In Poe's time, opium was widely used in the form of the popular, legal sedative drug laudanum. Like many of his contemporary writers, Poe took laudanum in increasing doses to try to combat what we would now recognize to be symptoms of depression and psychological stress. Because opium can produce powerful, vivid dreams, some writers also praised its effects on their imagination.

Poe on Character

"When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or corespond with the expression."

What's in the Cask?

Amontillado sherry, is a variety of fortified wine (a blend of wine and brandy) invented in Montilla, Spain in the 18th Century. It is a special blend of *palma* dry and pale sherries. First the sherry is aged under a *flor* yeast cap and then, exposed to oxygen, it takes on a darker color. It's unique aging process makes Amontillado darker than *fino* (Spanish for "fine," or dry sherries) but lighter than an *oloroso* (Spanish for "scented," or darker and richer sherries.) It is often served with soups or appetizers. A "pipe," by the way, is simply a large cask with tapered ends, (from the Portuguese *pipa*, "barrel") which can hold 400-600 liters of wine. Montresor's supposed purchase is thus an extremely large one, perhaps on the order of a luxury car.

Quoth the...

Ravens (*corvus corax*) have often been considered to be ill omens due to their dark color, dissonant squawking, and taste for carrion. They are intelligent birds who, if patiently trained, can be made to speak a handful of words. Unlike many wild birds, ravens can live up to thirty years. There are eight different breeds of raven in Palestine (although they are dwindling in other parts of the world) and their first appearance in the Bible is in Genesis when Noah sends one to find out the status of the flood (8:6-8).

Native American tribes regard the raven as either a messenger or a trickster; the Chinese regard them as solar symbols; the Egyptians as manifestations of destruction; Arab culture called the raven "father of Omens." European culture associates them with wisdom and prophecy, and in Norse myth, the god Odin is served by the ravens Wisdom and Memory. In Gaelic mythology, the death-predicting *bain sidhe* (banshees) could take the form of ravens.

Poe's poem "The Raven" marks another of the bird's sinister appearances in Western literature. Today, the poem and the bird are memorialized in Baltimore's NFL team, the Ravens.

Poe Is All Around

Claude Debussy was very influenced by Poe's work, and attempted to write two operas — both unfinished — based on his stories.

Sergei Rachmaninoff wrote a symphony based on *The Bells*.

Jim Reeves, **Joan Baez**, and **Radio Futura** have all recorded versions of *Annabel Lee*.

The Beatles mention Poe in their hallucinogenic song *I Am the Walrus*.

Lou Reed recorded a concept album called *The Raven* with music and spoken-word adaptations of Poe.

Britney Spears called her 2001-2002 concert tour "Dream Within a Dream."

What's In a Name?

Montresor: French for "my treasure"

Fortunato: Italian for "fortunate"

Poe's Times: A Chronology

1806: Touring actors David Poe, Jr. and Elizabeth Hopkins are married in Richmond, Virginia.

1807: Edgar's brother Henry is born in Boston.

1809: Edgar Poe is born in Boston.

1810: Edgar's sister Rosalie (Rosie) is born in Norfolk, Virginia.

1811: Poe's mother dies in Richmond following a sudden illness, probably pneumonia. At some point shortly before or after his wife's death, David Poe abandons the family and is never seen again. Edgar is taken in by the Allan family of Richmond; Rosie is fostered out to another Richmond family, while Henry remains with their grandparents in Baltimore.

1812: Edgar is rebaptized "Edgar Allan Poe," although he was never legally adopted by the Allans.

1815: Poe begins school, and moves to England with the Allans.

1820: Poe and the Allans return to Richmond.

1826: Poe enrolls at the newly-founded University of Virginia.

1827: Poe argues with his foster father over gambling debts incurred at college, and leaves the Allan house. He enlists in the U.S. army under an assumed name, Edgar A. Perry. His first book, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, is published anonymously in a limited circulation.

1829: Poe applies to West Point, and publishes his second book of poetry.

1830: Poe enters West Point, but has a change of heart, and is court-martialed and discharged for insubordination less than a year later.

1831: Poe publishes a third book of poetry, as well as several short stories. His brother Henry dies.

1834: John Allan dies, leaving nothing to Edgar in his will.

1835: Poe moves to Richmond and becomes editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*.

1836: Poe marries his cousin Virginia Clemm. The couple moves to New York, then Philadelphia, where Poe works as editor for a series of magazines.

1841: Poe's reputation grows with the publication of "Murders in the Rue Morgue."

1842: Poe and Charles Dickens meet in Philadelphia and discuss a never-to-be literary collaboration.

1843: Poe publishes "The Gold Bug," to further popular acclaim, and gives a series of highly-attended literary lectures.

1846: Burdened by debt, the Poes move to a small cottage in the then-rural Fordham area of the Bronx.

1847: Virginia Poe dies at home of tuberculosis.

1848: Poe attempts to give up drinking, and begins to court the widowed author Sarah Whitman. She turns him down when it becomes clear that he has resumed drinking.

1849: Poe makes another effort to overcome his alcoholism, and to reconnect with his childhood sweetheart Elmira Royster (now also a widow). A few weeks later, he dies in Baltimore under mysterious circumstances.

Terms and Phrases Found in *Nevermore*

Introduction

Eldorado— the "city of gold" in South American legend, and the title and subject of a poem by Poe in which it represents an unattainable paradise

Dreamland

Eidolon— a spirit, from the Greek word for "image, idol"
Thule— in ancient Greek writings, a distant island at the northern edges of the world, sometimes used to refer to any faraway land
legion— many, from the Latin legio, "army"

The Cask of Amontillado

immolation— destruction (literally, by being burnt alive)
connoisseurship— expertise, from the French connoître, "to know"
gemmary— the study of gems and jewels
accosted— greeted
Amontillado— a fortified wine (or "sherry") from the region of Montilla, near Cordoba, Spain
sherry— any fortified Spanish wine (Amontillado is a relatively rare type of sherry)
absconded— left
nitre— potassium nitrate, also known as "saltpeter." It is commonly found in caves and caverns as a white, crystalline mineral deposit.
DeGrave— a fine French wine
gesticulation— gesture
flambeau— torch
ignoramus— idiot

Second Hospital Scene ("The Women")

consumption— tuberculosis, a lung disease which was prevalent and deadly in the mid-19th century

Annabel Lee

sepulchre— a tomb
Stygian— of or pertaining to the river Styx, which was one of the rivers

of the underworld in Greek myth

bier— a wooden frame used to carry or display a corpse for burial
Paeon— a poem of praise and thanksgiving

Bridal Ballad

revery— dream, meditation

The Raven

obeisance— a bow or other gesture of respect
mien— appearance, expression
Pallas— the Greek goddess Athena
Plutonian— of or relating to Pluto (Hades), the Greek/Roman god of death and the underworld
censer— an incense-burner
Seraphim— a type of angel in Jewish and Christian traditions
nepenthe— a potion of forgetfulness, referred to in the *Odyssey*
balm in Gilead— a reference to a healing ointment from the region of Gilead (in modern-day Jordan), referred to in the Old Testament
Aidenn— an alternate spelling of "Eden"

The Tell-Tale Heart

dissimulation— concealing the truth
sagacity— wisdom, knowledge
scantlings— wooden framing or structural supports
tiger's eye— a semi-precious gem which adorns the watch

Shadow: A Parable

stylus— a pointed writing utensil, used for engraving
erotomaniac— someone suffering from a psychiatric disorder marked by delusions of love

The Conqueror Worm

imbued— soaked, dyed

Additional Topics for Discussion

About the Play

1. *Nevermore* centers on the final days of Edgar Allan Poe. How have some central facts of Poe’s life, the details surrounding his final days and his writings been interwoven in this play?
2. Many of the stories included in *Nevermore* center around duality or a division of the self. Cite specific examples of this found in *Nevermore*. Discuss where these are present in Poe’s writings and why.
3. Consider the relationship between Poe and his Demons as depicted in *Nevermore*. Do the Demons inspire Poe’s writing or act as literary leeches, draining him of his stories? Support your opinions.

About this Production

1. How does the set for *Nevermore* create the reality of Poe’s hospital room and the delirious landscape of his dreams with only a few pieces of furniture and simple backdrops? How do the backdrops help to set the tone of the production?
2. Discuss the use of costuming in this production. How do costumes define the differences between the real world and Poe’s nightmares? How do costumes create the more abstract characters like the Demons and the Raven?
3. Masks are used throughout *Nevermore*. Discuss how the masks are used in this production. How would this production have been different if there were no masks?
4. Discuss the use of sound and music in this production. Why do you think these choices were made? How would the play have been different without them?

Poe’s Writings in this Production

Note: Some sequences in *Nevermore* contain only selections from the poems and stories listed below.

DREAMLAND
 THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO
 LENORE
 THE BRIDAL BALLAD
 ANNABEL LEE
 THE RAVEN
 ALONE
 THE TELL-TALE HEART
 SHADOW- A PARABLE
 THE CONQUEROR WORM
 A DREAM WITHIN A DREAM
 and various correspondence to and from Edgar Allan Poe

Follow-up Activities

1. Write a review of this production of *Nevermore*. Be sure to include specific information and your own reactions to both the acting and the design elements (like set and costumes). Explain what you liked about the production and what you disliked, and support your opinions. Then submit your review to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey’s Education Department, or see if it can be published in your school newspaper.
2. **Horror, Then and Now.** Poe was influenced by the so-called “gothic” novels of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Gothic literature typically included most, if not all, of the following elements: a mysterious setting (an old castle, dungeon or haunted house), secret passageways, ghosts, storms, mysterious illnesses, family secrets, and twins. Choose a scene from a contemporary horror film and compare it with one of Poe’s stories, analyzing both in terms of their use of Gothic elements. As an extension of this you could script, storyboard and/or shoot your own short gothic horror film, using the conventions of this genre.
3. **A Man Alone?** Select a poem by Poe and a poem by one of his contemporaries, such as Longfellow or Tennyson. How are they similar in their vocabulary, rhyme schemes, etc.? How are they different?
4. **Adaptations.** Working in a small group, try your own hand at adapting one of Poe’s poems or short stories for the stage. What characters and/or language would need to be cut? How could music, costumes and props, for example, enhance the audience’s understanding of the text? Present and discuss your adaptations. What made them more or less successful in conveying Poe’s meaning?
5. **Behind the Mask.** Masks have long been used as part of theatrical performance around the world, as well as in other cultural and religious settings. Research the history and cultural symbolism of a particular kind of mask: Halloween masks, Carnival/Mardi Gras masks, Japanese Noh theatre, Balinese Wayang Topeng, British mummer’s dances, or one of many more.
6. **Play/Pause/Rewind.** There are several film versions of Poe’s stories which may be available at your local library. Choose one and view it as a class, observing how the actors in the production speak, interpret and move to Poe’s language. Make liberal use of the pause button to stop and ask specific questions, then rewind and watch the entire scene through uninterrupted. Compare the video adaptation to the stage adaptation of *Nevermore*— how do the two media differ in their approach to Poe?

Teachers:

Do you have activities or exercises to suggest for this play? We are always looking for new ideas to inspire students (and teachers). Send your suggestions to info@ShakespeareNJ.org, and we will share them with other teachers, or maybe even include them in future study guides.

Test Your Understanding

- In *THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO*, what reason does Montresor give for wanting to kill Fortunato?
 - Fortunato owes him money
 - He hates Fortunato's vulture-like eye
 - Fortunato insulted him
 - Voices told him to do it
- In *THE CONQUEROR WORM*, the "performance" that Poe describes is —
 - The Tragedy of "MAN."
 - "The Comedy of "LIFE."
 - The Comedy of "DEATH."
 - The Romance of "DEATH."
- Edgar Allan Poe died —
 - alone at home
 - beaten on a street corner
 - drunkenly falling in front of a train
 - in a hospital
- Edgar's child-bride, who was also his first cousin, was —
 - Maria Clemm
 - Sarah Elmyra Royster
 - Lenore Poe
 - Virginia Clemm
- How does Montresor kill Fortunato in *THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO*?
 - walls him up in a secluded section of the catacombs, and leaves him there
 - smothers him with a pillow after creeping nightly into his room for a week
 - sets him on fire in the middle of a great festival
 - Montresor does not kill Fortunato at all
- Why does the protagonist kill the Old Man in *THE TELL-TALE HEART*?
 - The Old Man stole from him
 - The Old Man had a frightening eye
 - The Old Man's heart beat loudly
 - The Old Man insulted him
- In *ALONE*, Poe states that one of the central problems of his life has been:
 - The discovery of his foster father's infidelities
 - The knowledge that he was different from others
 - His visions of demons
 - The fact that he was an orphan
- In *THE RAVEN*, the *narrator* speaks one word into the darkness when he opens the door. What is it?
 - Nevermore
 - Evermore
 - Farewell
 - Lenore
- Which of the following stories/poems by Edgar Allan Poe is not told in the first person by the protagonist?
 - THE TELL-TALE HEART*
 - all of these selections are told in first person
 - THE RAVEN*
 - THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO*
- The protagonist in *THE TELL-TALE HEART* confesses his crime when —
 - when he hears the beating of the murdered man's heart.
 - the officers discover the dead man's body.
 - the old man breaks free from the catacombs in which he was left.
 - the protagonist never confesses his crime.
- Many of the women in Poe's life died from the same disease. What was it?
 - cancer
 - tuberculosis
 - alcoholism
 - cholera
- According to the doctor's report, Edgar Allan Poe's final words were —
 - "The Best thing my best friend could do for me is to blow my brains out with a pistol."
 - "Virginia, my love."
 - "Nevermore."
 - "Lord, bless my poor soul."
- What woman's name does Poe reference in several of his poems?
 - Virginia
 - Elizabeth
 - Lenore
 - Annabel Lee
- Besides "Nevermore," what other words does the raven speak?
 - none
 - Sorrow
 - Lenore
 - Nepenthe
- In *ANNABEL LEE*, the title character dies because she:
 - overdoses on laudanum
 - is murdered by her brothers
 - is murdered by her husband
 - catches a chill

Meeting NJ Core Curriculum Standards

With New Jersey’s implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards, teachers and administrators are seeking programs and materials that will help achieve these requirements. By merely viewing a performance by *Shakespeare LIVE!* and participating in the post-performance discussion, students can meet many Curriculum Standards. The activities included in this study guide, when implemented in the classroom, as well as teacher assigned writing assignments will allow students to meet additional Curriculum Standards.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS STANDARDS

The Visual and Performing Arts Standards require students to experience, perform and comment on various forms of fine art. A *Shakespeare LIVE!* performance, and incorporation of the enclosed study guide exercises, will help meet the following Curriculum Standards.

- STANDARD 1.1: All students will use aesthetic knowledge in the creation of and in responses to dance, music, theatre and visual arts.
- STANDARD 1.2: All students will utilize those skills, media, methods, and technologies appropriate to each of art form in the creation, performance, and presentation of dance, music, theatre and/or visual arts.
- STANDARD 1.4: All students will develop, apply and reflect upon knowledge of the process of critique.
- STANDARD 1.5: All students will understand and analyze the role, development, and continuing influence of the arts in relation to world cultures, history, and society.

LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY STANDARDS

Active listening and responding to what has been presented are two major aspects of the Language Arts Literacy Standard. A *Shakespeare LIVE!* performance can be used as a springboard classes to help students meet the following Standards.

- STANDARD 3.2: All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources.
- STANDARD 3.3: All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.

SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Gaining an awareness and understanding of various cultures and cultural influences throughout history is part of the root of the Social Studies Standards. A *Shakespeare LIVE!* performance can, once again, be used as a springboard into activities that will help meet the following Standard.

- STANDARD 6.2: All students will learn democratic citizenship through the humanities, by studying literature, art, history and philosophy, and related fields.

Test Your Understanding Answer Key

- 1. c 2. a 3. d 4. d 5. a 6. b
- 7. b 8. d 9. b 10. a 11. b 12. d
- 13. c 14. a 15. d

Artwork Credits:

- p4: Photograph from an original daguerrotype of Edgar Allan Poe taken in Providence, RI in 1848. From the Prints and Photographs collection of the Library of Congress.
- p5: Illustration by Harry Clarke for “The Cask of Amontillado” in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination by Edgar Allan Poe*, London: Harrap and Company, 1919.
- p6: *The Rake’s Progress #8* by William Hogarth (1735). From the collection of the Soane Museum, London.
- p7: Illustration by Edouard Manet for “The Raven” in *Les Poèmes d’Edgar Poe*, trans. Stéphane Mallarmé, Paris: L. Vanier, 1889.
- p8: Illustration by John Tenniel for “The Raven” in *The Poetical Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, London: Sampson Low, 1858.
- p14: Photo of the F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre, the Main Stage venue of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, 1998.

Sources for this study guide:

- Edgar Allan Poe* by Bettina L. Knapp
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- “The Imagination at Play: Edgar Allan Poe,” by Terrence Martin, *Kenyon Review*, Spring 1966.
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- Poe, Death and the Life of Writing* by J. Gerald Kennedy
- Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe* by Daniel Hoffman
- The Portable Poe*, edited by Philip Van Doren Stern
- Plots and Characters in the Fiction and Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe* by Robert L. Gale
- The Human Race Theatre Company study guide for *Nevermore*
- The Renaissance Center study guide for *Nightfall with Edgar Allan Poe*
- <http://www.online-literature.com/poe/>
- The Edgar Allan Poe Museum website: <http://www.poemuseum.org/>
- <http://www.biography.com>
- <http://www.eapoe.org>
- <http://www.victorianweb.org>
- <http://www.wikipedia.org>
- <http://www.literature.org/authors/poe-edgar-allan/>

About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

The acclaimed Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of the leading Shakespeare theatres in the nation. Serving nearly 100,000 adults and children annually, it is New Jersey's only professional theatre company dedicated to Shakespeare's canon and other classic masterworks. Through its distinguished productions and education programs, the company strives to illuminate the universal and lasting relevance of the classics for contemporary audiences. The longest-running Shakespeare theatre on the east coast, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey marks its 46th season in 2008.

In addition to producing and presenting classic theatre, the Theatre's mission places an equal focus on education— both for young artists and audiences of all ages. The Theatre nurtures emerging new talent for the American stage and cultivates future audiences by providing extensive student outreach opportunities. Through our work, we endeavor to promote literacy, civilization, community, cultural awareness, the theatrical tradition, and a more enlightened view of the world in which we live and the people with whom we share it.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of 20 professional theatres in the state of New Jersey. The company's dedication to the classics and commitment to excellence sets critical standards for the field. Nationwide, the Theatre has emerged as one of the most exciting "new" theatres under the leadership of Artistic Director, Bonnie J. Monte since 1990. It is one of only a handful of Shakespeare Theatres on the east coast, and in recent years has drawn larger and larger audiences and unprecedented critical acclaim. The opening of the intimate, 308-seat F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre in 1998, provided the Theatre with a state-of-the-art venue with excellent sightlines, and increased access for patrons and artists with disabilities.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is a member of ArtPride, The Shakespeare Theatre Association of America, Theatre Communications Group, and is a founding member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance.

Other Opportunities for Students... and Teachers

SHAKESPEARE LIVE! EDUCATIONAL TOURING COMPANY

Shakespeare LIVE! is the educational touring company of The Shakespeare Theatre. This dynamic troupe of actors brings exceptional abridged productions of Shakespeare's masterworks directly into the classroom. Workshops are also available in Stage Combat and Shakespeare in Performance.

JUNIOR AND SENIOR CORPS

Young actors are given the opportunity to participate in the excitement of the Theatre's summer season through this program, which offers classes, a final presentation, as well as behind-the-scenes and front-of-house experience. Geared for students in grades 6 through 12, admission to this program is through audition and/or interview.

SUMMER PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

For graduating high school seniors and for university students, the intensive Summer Professional Training Program offers acting apprenticeships and professional internships, providing academic training and hands-on experience in acting, technical, artistic and arts management areas. For a full brochure of the opportunities available, please contact the Education Department.

SHAKEFEST: SUMMER SHAKESPEARE INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS

Designed for elementary and secondary teachers of Shakespeare, *ShakeFest* is an weeklong intensive filled with myriad practical ways to conquer "ShakesFear" and excite students about the Bard. In hands-on sessions, experienced teaching artists model active and exciting performance-oriented techniques to get students on their feet and "speaking the speech."

SHAKESPERIENCE: NJ STUDENT SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

This annual spring festival, developed in partnership with the Folger Shakespeare Library and Rider University, gives middle and high school classes the opportunity to spend a day at the Theatre experiencing Shakespeare together as both actors and audience. The *Shakespeare: NJ* Festival celebrates the power of performance as a teaching tool on a statewide scale.



For more information about these
and other educational programs
at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey,
log onto our website,
www.ShakespeareNJ.org
or call **(973) 408-3980**