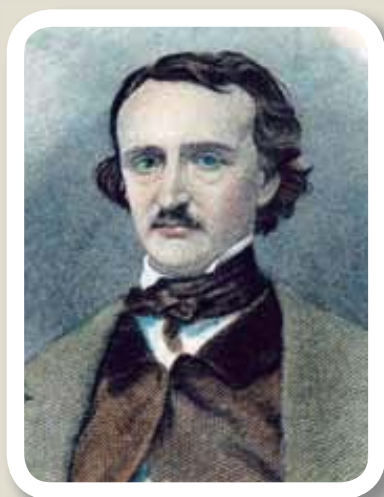


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19th 1809 in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. His parents died when he was just two years old, and he was brought up¹ by John Allan, a Scottish businessman.

Poe was educated in Britain and the US. He was a good student and he attended the University of Virginia, and the famous West Point Military Academy. Poe spent two years in the army and in this period he completed his first two collections of poetry, published in 1827 and 1829.

Poe worked as a journalist and critic with several magazines and newspapers. He wrote many short stories including *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1843) and *The Black Cat* (1843). These



stories dealt with² dark, disturbing³ themes and in America Poe was criticized for his 'Gothic'⁴ writing style. In Europe, however, his work was popular and influential.

Poe suffered from illness and depression. The deaths of several close family members including his young wife Virginia affected him deeply. To alleviate⁵ his depression Poe drank heavily, but this caused health problems. His writing earned him little money, and he lived in poverty, accumulating debts. He died on October 7th 1849.

Poe's major contribution to world literature was the development of the short story as an art form.

1 bring up 長大

2 deal with 處理

3 disturbing [dis'tɜːbɪŋ] (a.) 使心神不寧的

4 Gothic ['ɡəʊθɪk] (a.) 氣氛詭異的哥德式小說的

5 alleviate [ə'liːvɪ,et] (v.) 減輕；緩和



THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

ABOUT THE BOOK

The three stories in this collection, ***The Fall of the House of Usher***, ***The Oval Portrait***, and ***The Masque of the Red Death*** are examples of short stories in the 'Gothic' tradition. Gothic literature became popular in Britain in the late 18th century and it explores the dark side of human nature and experience: death, ghosts, alienation¹, depression, madness² and desolate³ settings. Poe brought Gothic literature to America. The atmosphere created by Poe in each of these stories is one of both physical and psychological fear and horror. Recurrent⁴ themes in the stories are madness and death.

1 alienation [ˌeljəˈneɪʃən] (n.) 疏遠；離間

2 madness [ˈmædnɪs] (n.) 瘋狂

3 desolate [ˈdeslɪt] (a.) 絕望的；悽慘的

4 recurrent [rɪˈkʊərənt] (a.) 一再發生的

5 feature [ˈfi:tʃə] (n.) 特徵；特色

6 troubled [ˈtrʌblɪd] (a.) 苦惱的

7 demented [dɪˈmentɪd] (a.) 精神錯亂的

8 bury [ˈberi] (v.) 埋葬


The Fall of the House of Usher was written in 1839.

It is one of Poe's most popular horror stories and contains all the essential features⁵ of a Gothic story: a frightening house, a desolate landscape, a mysterious illness, stormy weather and troubled⁶ characters. The story, which tells of the demented⁷ Roderick Usher and his strange twin sister, Lady Madeline, is now regarded as a classic short story masterpiece.

Poe creates a sense of claustrophobia in the story. The characters cannot move freely within the house. And the narrator cannot escape until the house physically collapses. Madeline and Roderick are twins and this stops them from developing as full individuals. Madeline is buried⁸ while she is still alive and she finally kills her brother by falling on him and crushing him.


The story has inspired many other works including films, operas, plays, popular music, computer games and numerous works of fiction.


BEFORE READING

-  **1** Look at these scenes from *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Discuss with a partner.



- a** Write at least 5 words or phrases to describe each scene.
- b** What is the atmosphere like in each one?
- c** What is happening in each scene?

-  **2** Working in groups of three or four, look at the pictures and your descriptions once more. Together write two or three sentences to describe what you think will happen in the story. Compare your summary with those of the other groups in the class.


-  **3** You may find this story and the others in this book very frightening. Or perhaps nothing frightens you! Work with a partner. Describe your scariest experience, or something you heard or saw that made you feel afraid.


- 4** Irrational fears are also called phobias. Can you match these phobias with their meanings?

_____ (a) arachnophobia	(1) fear of closed spaces
_____ (b) claustrophobia	(2) fear of storms
_____ (c) brontophobia	(3) fear of dead things
_____ (d) agoraphobia	(4) fear of spiders
_____ (e) necrophobia	(5) fear of open spaces

- 5** What are you afraid of? Here are some of the things that make people feel afraid. How do they affect you? Rate them from 0 (not at all scary) to 5 (very scary).

_____ (a) bees and wasps
_____ (b) being on your own
_____ (c) exams
_____ (d) flying
_____ (e) going to the dentist
_____ (f) heights
_____ (g) lifts
_____ (h) the dark

-  **6** Work with a partner and write sentences comparing how you both feel about the things above.

-  **7** Listen to the opening of the story. Which of the sentences below best describes how the narrator feels? Tick (✓).

- _____ (a) The narrator is looking forward to going to the House of Usher.
- _____ (b) The narrator is indifferent to going to the House of Usher.
- _____ (c) The narrator feels uneasy and unhappy about going to the House of Usher.





For a whole dull¹, dark, and soundless autumn day, when the clouds were low in the sky, I had been riding alone through the dreary² countryside. Eventually, as evening fell, I found myself within view of the melancholy House of Usher. When I saw the building, I felt a sense of gloom³.

I looked at the scene before me – at the house and the simple landscape, at the bleak⁴ walls, at the vacant eye-like windows, at the rough grass, and at a few white trunks of decayed⁵ trees – with a sense of depression, like an opium addict awakening from his dream. I felt a sense of iciness and my heart felt cold and heavy. What was it that made me so nervous when I thought about the House of Usher? It was a mystery, and I could not fight against the dark thoughts that filled me.

PLACES

- Have you ever visited a place and suddenly felt happy or sad? Describe how you felt. Why did this place make you feel this way?
- Was it something to do with the weather, the appearance of the place, or the people who were there?

- 1 dull [dʌl] (a.) 陰沉的
- 2 dreary ['driəri] (a.) 沉悶的；陰鬱的
- 3 gloom [glum] (n.) 陰鬱
- 4 bleak [blik] (a.) 荒涼的
- 5 decayed [di'ked] (a.) 腐朽的



I was forced to come to the unsatisfactory conclusion that some things are beyond our understanding. If the scene in front of me had been arranged in any different way it possibly would not have left me with such a sad impression. With this in mind, I rode my horse to the edge of a black lake that was close to the house and, trembling more than before, I looked down on the reflection of the grey grass, the ghastly¹ tree trunks, and the empty eye-like windows in the water.

Nevertheless, I was proposing to stay a few weeks in this gloomy house. Its owner, Roderick Usher, had been one of my childhood companions, but it had been many years since our last meeting. A letter from him had reached me, and it gave evidence that he was very disturbed. The writer spoke of physical illness, and of a disorder of the mind. He said I was his best and only friend, and he felt that the cheerfulness of my company would lessen² his malady³. I did not hesitate when I read this. I obeyed his request immediately.

RODERICK USHER

- How does the narrator know Roderick Usher?
- Why does Usher write to the narrator?
- What does Usher ask the narrator to do?

1 ghastly [ˈgæstli] (a.) 如鬼魅的

2 lessen [ˈlesn̩] (v.) 減緩

3 malady [ˈmælədi] (n.) 痼疾

4 reserved [rɪˈzɜːvd] (a.) 緘默的

5 I was aware 我知道

6 produce [prəˈdʒʊs] (v.) 繁衍

7 branch [bræntʃ] (n.) 旁系後代

8 direct line of descent 一脈相傳的嫡系