

# StudySync Lesson Plan

## The Tell-Tale Heart

### Objectives

1. Engage students in the plot, language and themes of Edgar Allan Poe's classic short story "The Tell-Tale Heart," preparing them for in-depth discussion and written analysis about the text.
2. Practice and reinforce the following Grade 8 ELA Common Core Standards for reading literature, writing, and speaking and listening:
  - READING: LITERATURE – RL.8.1-7, 9-10**
  - WRITING – W.8.1-10**
  - SPEAKING AND LISTENING – SL.8.1-6**

### Time

130 minutes (with up to an additional 250 minutes of extension possibilities)

### Materials

SyncTV Premium Lesson on Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart"

### Overview

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the best-known and most influential writers in all of literature, and "The Tell-Tale Heart" is one of his most famous stories. In the story, an unnamed narrator, desperate to prove his sanity, proves just the opposite in recounting what drove him to commit murder. As an author, Poe was a Gothic moralist whose themes and styles were distinctly his own: many of his stories deal with macabre subjects like insanity, murder, torture and death. He explored other genres, too, but "The Tell-Tale Heart" exemplifies the tone and subject matter for which Poe is best remembered. Students will read a classic horror story open to multiple lines of analysis, and also be introduced to important literary concepts regarding point of view and narration. Close examination of this excerpt will offer students the opportunity to discuss and write in-depth responses to the text, consistent with the ELA Common Core Standards for Grade 8.

## Background (10 minutes)

1. **Watch the Preview** (*SL.8.1-2*). As a group, watch the video preview of the premium lesson. After viewing, use the following questions to spur a discussion:
  - a. What do you know about the works of Edgar Allan Poe? Which other works of his have you read before? Think of descriptive words you associate with his body of work. Is he known for a particular tone or mood in his stories and poems?
  - b. Now consider the images and music in the preview: What do they tell you about the mood and tone of the story you're about to read? Do they match up with your earlier impression of the author?
  - c. What might be some of the challenges in getting away with a "perfect murder"? Consider both external and internal forces that might prevent someone from getting away with murder, even if it were "perfectly planned and executed." Which might be the most difficult of these forces to overcome?

## Extension (additional 75 minutes)

- d. **Research** (*W.8.4, 7 and SL.8.1-2*). What does it mean when a story is called "Gothic"? Have students research Gothic literature—short stories, poems, novels—and write a brief response explaining the genre, its conventions, and its most important authors and works. Have students extend their research into Gothic art and architecture, if desired. Have a class discussion about notable works of Gothic art and literature.
- e. **Read** (*W.8.7, 9 and SL.8.1*). Have students search academic websites and find a short biography of the life of Edgar Allan Poe. They should list at least five things about his life that are noteworthy or surprising and prepare these items for a discussion or quiz in the following class.
- f. **Discuss** (*W.8.7 and SL.8.4-6 and RL.8.9*). Poe's work is referenced continually in pop culture, film, art, music, and more. Ask students to bring in an example of a book, a movie, a TV show, etc. that alludes to—or explicitly references—one of Poe's stories or poems. Students should be prepared to present their findings to the class, integrating images, audio or video into their presentations, wherever appropriate.
- g. **Explore and Share** (*W.8.4, 7, 9 and SL.8.5*). The website <http://poestories.com/gallery.php> is a great database of online materials related to the life and writings of Edgar Allan Poe. Have students explore this website, and create an online group or shared webpage where students can post images and findings from this website (and others), along with a short description. (Picasa is a good program since there is no age restriction.)

## Engaging the Text (120 minutes)

### 2. Read the Text (30 minutes)

- a. **Read and Annotate** (*RL.8.1-4, 6*). Have students read and annotate the introduction and excerpt. If students are completing as a homework assignment, ask them to write any questions they have into the annotation tool—these questions are visible to you after the students submit their writing assignments or beforehand if you use the "Mimic" function to access the students' accounts.

- b. **Discuss** (*SL.8.1, 3*). Have students get into small groups or pairs and briefly discuss the questions and inferences they had while reading. As a class, discuss the following:

The narrator makes no point at the beginning to prove his innocence; he's only interested in proving his sanity. Discuss the many contradictions in the narrator's "proof." Do you think he is sane or insane? What might lead you to believe he is sane, and what might lead you to believe he is insane? How do these elements frequently contradict each other?

**Extension (additional 25 minutes)**

- c. **Listen and Discuss** (*SL.8.1-3*). As a class, listen to the audio reading of the text. Ask students to share how their understanding of the text changed after listening. What additional images came to mind? What words did the author use to develop the setting?
- d. **Comprehend** (*RL.8.1-6, 10*). Have students complete the multiple-choice questions. Collect papers or discuss answers as a class.
- e. **Illustrate** (*ELL and RL.8.1*). What do you imagine the world of "The Tell-Tale Heart" looks like? Ask students to draw their own illustrations of one of the scenes or images from the short story. Students must use at least three details from the story, citing the direct passage or quote for each.

**3. Watch SyncTV (30 minutes)**

- a. **Watch**. Either watch the SyncTV discussion as a class or ask students to watch it on their individual computers.
- b. **Focus** (*SL.8.1-3 and RL.8.6*). Take a close look at the discussion from 0:55-1:30, as the SyncTV students talk about the basic functions of the narrator in a story and break down the different kinds of point-of-view (POV) that a writer can use in telling a story. Remember these terms and ideas as they form the basis of the discussion to come.
- c. **Focus** (*SL.8.1-3 and RL.8.1, 3-4, 6*). Now focus on the portion from 1:44-2:42, as the SyncTV students continue their discussion of narration, now using quotes from the first-person narration to make inferences about the narrator's nature.
- d. **Focus** (*SL.8.1-3 and RL.8.1, 3-4, 6*). From 3:42-4:55, the SyncTV students use what they know about narration and POV to come to conclusions about why the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" is unreliable. Focus on this idea of "unreliable narration," and the contrast between how the reader views the narrator and how the narrator views himself.
- e. **Discuss** (*RL.8.1-6, 10 and SL.8.1-3, 5*). After watching the model discussion, have a conversation with the class about the ideas discussed in the SyncTV episode. What new thoughts do they have after hearing the students' discussion? Next, divide students into small groups (3-4 students). Move around the room monitoring groups as students follow the SyncTV episode as a model to discuss some of the following questions:
- i. What is "dramatic irony"? (If students are uncertain, define it as a class: in brief, when the reader knows more than a character does.) How does the presence of an unreliable narrator create dramatic irony in a story? How

does it make this particular story more exciting or interesting than it would have been if the narrator were more “reliable”?

- ii. The crime committed by the narrator is a heinous act, yet as the narrator discusses his reasons for killing the old man his demeanor is clinical and sometimes even logical. What does this tell you about the narrator’s character? What conclusions about him can we draw from this stark contrast?
- iii. The narrator in Poe’s story focuses on the eye and the heart of the old man, both of which he fears greatly at different points in the story. What do you think these two things represent, or symbolize? Why is the narrator so afraid of the “vulture eye” and the beating heart?
- iv. To whom is this story being told? Use clues from the narration to infer whom the narrator is speaking to while recounting this tale. How does this framing device add meaning to the story? Why do you think Poe chose to tell it in this manner, as opposed to in real-time?
- v. The story is deliberately ambiguous in many parts: we don’t know the narrator’s name, occupation, or even gender! (It is generally assumed that the narrator is a man, but Poe never explicitly states this.) Why do you think Poe chose to be so ambiguous? How might the story be affected if we were given more information about the characters and events in the story?
- vi. How does Poe use form in the second-to-last section of the story to heighten the mood? Analyze how the author uses language differently in the opening than he does at the story’s end, and how this mirrors the narrator’s volatile internal state.

#### Extension (additional 75 minutes)

- f. **Mock Trial** (*W.8.9 and SL.8.1-6*). Divide the class into small groups and have them stage a mock trial of the narrator from “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Keep in mind that the narrator has already confessed his crime; what’s left to decide is how his mental state affects his guilt. Is he sane or insane? What should be his punishment? Have the class act out the trial and come to a verdict and sentence. Film the trial, if desired, and post the video to a shared class website or group.
- g. **Compare** (*RL.8.5, 9*). “The Tell-Tale Heart” was highly influential in the modern genre of “psychological horror.” Compare and contrast Poe’s short story with a modern example of the genre (film or novel): How do they both use subjectivity and unreliable narration as a storytelling device? What elements in both stories make them horrific? Why did they have such a strong effect on so many readers or audience members?
- h. **Write and Perform** (*W.8.3, 9 and SL.8.1-6*). Split students into groups of four or five, and have each group write a short play of “The Tell-Tale Heart.” When they are finished, have the groups perform their plays in front of the class. The performances may be filmed, edited, and/or shared online, if the class desires.

#### 4. Think (10 minutes)

- a. **Respond** (*W.8.1, 4*). Ask students to read the “Think” questions, watch the corresponding video clips, and respond to the questions, either in class or for homework.

## 5. Write (50 minutes)

- a. **Discuss** (SL.8.1). Read the prompt you have chosen for students, and then solicit questions regarding the prompt or the assignment expectations. Whichever prompt you have chosen, make sure you are clear about the assignment expectations and the rubric by which you and the other students will be evaluating them.
- b. **Organize** (RL.8.1-5, 10 and W.8.1-2). Ask students to go back and annotate the text with the prompt in mind. They should be organizing their thoughts and the points they'll address in their writing as they make annotations. If you've worked on outlining or other organizational tools for writing, this is a good place to apply them.
- c. **Write** (W.8.1-2, 4-5, 9–10). Have students go through the writing process of planning, revising, editing, and publishing their writing responses.
- d. **Review** (W.8.4-6). Use the StudySync "Review" feature to have students complete one to two evaluations of their peers' work based on your chosen review rubric. Have the students look at and reflect upon the peer evaluations of their own writing. What might you do differently in a revision? How might you strengthen the writing and the ideas?

### Extension (additional 75 minutes)

- e. **Write** (*W.8.1-2, 4-5, 9-10*). For homework, have students write an essay using one of the prompts you did not choose to do in class. Students should publish their responses online.
- f. **Write Creatively** (*W.8.3-4, 9*). In around 300 words, retell Poe's classic tale as if it had been told by a neutral, third- person narrator, either close or omniscient. How would this shift change the meaning and impact of the story? What perspective would be gained from this switch in point of view? What would be lost?
- g. **Blast!** (*W.8.2, 4, 9*). Create a Blast! topic asking students to weigh in on the following questions: Is it ever really possible to "get away" with murder? Even if someone successfully escapes the law, can they escape their own conscience? What are some of the external and internal factors that might weigh heavily on a murderer?

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

### Key Vocabulary

1. acute (*adj.*) – Sharp, sensitive
2. hearken (*v.*) – (old-fashioned) To listen
3. dissimulation (*n.*) – The act of concealing or hiding the truth
4. sagacity (*n.*) – The quality of being clever and sharp
5. stifled (*adj.*) – Restrained, suffocated
6. fancy (*v.*) – (chiefly British) To imagine or to like something
7. supposition (*n.*) – An idea or theory without proof
8. crevice (*n.*) – A narrow crack or opening
9. dissemble (*v.*) – To hide your feelings or truths
10. audacity (*n.*) – The state of being daring and overtly confident, often too much so

### Reading Comprehension Questions

1. The narrator tries to assert his sanity at the beginning of the story by pointing to his \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. innocence
  - b. nervousness
  - c. intelligence
  - d. sharp senses
2. All of the following are true about the narrator EXCEPT
  - a. He was after the old man's gold, even though he denies it.
  - b. He was disturbed by the old man's gaze.
  - c. He doesn't remember when or how he had decided to kill the old man.
  - d. He claims to have had no problem with the old man himself.
3. In talking about how he went through with the murder, the narrator's attitude is best described as \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. apologetic
  - b. uncertain
  - c. proud
  - d. anxious
4. The narrator was unable to kill the old man the first seven nights because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. the old man's eye was closed
  - b. the old man was wide awake
  - c. the narrator had second thoughts
  - d. he feared the old man had heard him
5. We can infer that the old man \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. was afraid of burglars
  - b. somehow knew the narrator

- c. was partially blind
  - d. all of the above
6. The narrator knows the old man is afraid of his presence because \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. the old man lets out a terrified groan
  - b. the narrator can hear the old man's heartbeat
  - c. both a and b
  - d. neither a nor b
7. The narrator kills the old man by \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. suffocating him
  - b. stabbing him
  - c. shooting him
  - d. poisoning him
8. The narrator convinces the police there hasn't been any foul play because \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. he tells them the old man doesn't live there
  - b. he is calm and assured
  - c. he denies the neighbors could have heard any scream
  - d. all of the above
9. To the narrator, the sound "a watch makes when enveloped in cotton" is the sound of \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. a clock
  - b. the old man's heartbeat
  - c. mice in the wall
  - d. his own heartbeat
10. At the story's end, the narrator confesses his \_\_\_\_\_ to the police.
- a. guilt
  - b. insanity
  - c. motive
  - d. fear

### Answer Key

- 1. D
- 2. A
- 3. C
- 4. A
- 5. D
- 6. C
- 7. A
- 8. B
- 9. B
- 10. A

## Further Assignments

1. Read some of Poe's other short stories, particularly "The Black Cat" and "William Wilson." In each of these three stories, there is a sense of dramatic irony created by a certain disconnect within the mind of the narrators. Compare and contrast the three stories, discussing their similarities in plot and theme, as well as their differences. (*RL.8.1-6 and W.8.9*)
2. Many narrators in literature can be deemed "unreliable." Have students choose another famous story—a short story, a novel (e.g., *Huckleberry Finn*), a film (*Memento*, *Rashomon*) or TV show—featuring a famously unreliable narrator. In a written response, students should discuss why this narrator is unreliable and what this adds to the story and its overall effect. (*RL.8.5-6 and W.8.1-2, 9*)
3. Screen one of the many filmed adaptations of "The Tell-Tale Heart" for the class. Discuss how the adaptation translates the original text, and whether it is faithful to the spirit of the original. (*RL.8.7 and SL.8.1, 3*)
4. Students might be surprised to hear that Edgar Allan Poe is often called the father of the detective fiction genre. Have students read one or more of Poe's detective stories: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," or "The Purloined Letter." Have them discuss or write responses to the following questions: What was the stories' influence in the creation of the genre? What conventions did they inspire? What modern works are indebted to these stories? (*RL.8.5, 9; W.8.4, 9; and SL.8.1*)
5. Most students will probably be familiar with some of Poe's poems, chiefly "The Raven," which is referenced frequently in pop culture works. Read "The Raven" and some of Poe's other poems: "Annabelle Lee," "Lenore," "To Helen," "The Bells," and others. Discuss or write responses the following questions: How do these poems bear the mark of Edgar Allan Poe? How do they fit into his overall body of work? How are the tone and themes of the poems similar to his short stories? (*RL.8.5, 9; W.8.1-2, 9; and SL.8.1*)
6. Noting how Poe is deliberately vague in "The Tell-Tale Heart," have students fill in the story with additional descriptive details. Things to consider: Where does the narrator live? What is his relationship with the old man? What is his occupation? Who is he telling the story to? Have students make a list of additional information about the setting and characters that was omitted from the story. (*ELL*)