

Searching for *Frisson* – The Life and Death of Edgar Allan Poe

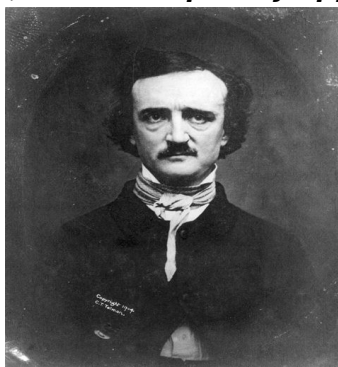
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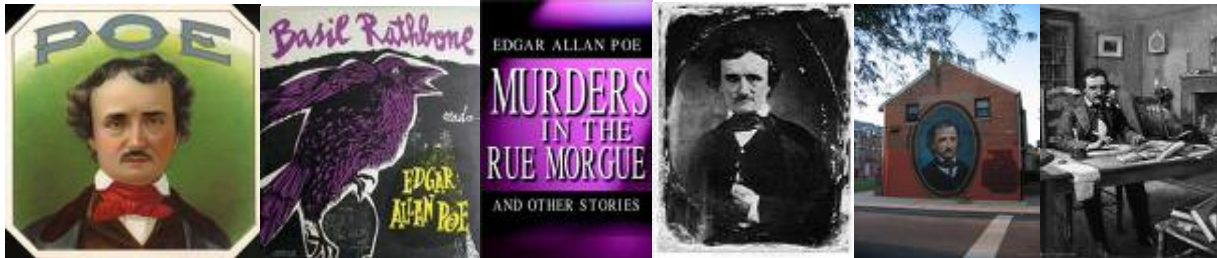


- **Overview of the unit:** Few romantic authors are as universally recognized by our students as Edgar Allan Poe. Poe's idea that the short story should be limited to "a certain unique or single effect" to which every other detail was subordinate is echoed today in the works of many post-modern authors. This concept emphasized unity of mood, time, space, and action working together to achieve the "certain unique or single effect," or "frisson" as Poe liked to say. The results of his work are clearly successful as evidenced by both the aforementioned echoes and the fact that Poe's contributions to the text that are an inherent part of our culture have stood the test of time quite well.

In this unit we explore the life of Edgar Allan Poe and some of his most notable works including *The Raven*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. But first, we identify the idea of frisson and research Poe's life and death on an interactive web site that informs both the mystery and the single effect that Poe endeavored to maintain.

I urge you to open another web tab and proceed through the worksheet noted below – it is interesting, fun, and conceptually appropriate to the Poe legend!





Unit Objectives:

- 1. Students will demonstrate the ability to discern characteristics/purposes of short stories.**
- 2. Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and analyze thematic elements emerging from short stories and poems.**
- 3. Students will access Web-based resources to research Poe biographies.**
- 4. Students will demonstrate the ability to make connections between contemporary texts (books, stories, film, television, and fashion) to Romanticism and Poe.**

Learning Activities:

- 1. Students are introduced to the Poe unit through a reconstruction of the previous work we have completed on the themes of Romanticism.**
- 2. Linkage from specific themes to contemporary culture is explored through discussion identifying examples of current texts that inform the Romantic themes. Students must defend their positions by rationalizing why their specified example applies.**
- 3. Students are introduced to Poe's thoughts on the creation of the short story and "frisson" and are then asked to re-cast their rationalizations through the lens of "a certain unique or single effect". This discussion sets students onto a course that allows them to not only see the content of the opening laptop activity, but to experience the frisson firsthand.**
- 4. Students complete the following laptop activity:**

American Literature – Edgar Allan Poe Worksheet Your Name _____

Today's Date _____

Instructions: Go to a computer, hook up your earphones and proceed to the following website:

<http://knowingpoe.thinkport.org>

Highlight and click "POE THE **PERSON**" to the left of Edgar's desk

Scroll down slightly and click on "It'll be the Death of Me..."

Click on It'll be the Death of Me link in the center of your screen. This will open a new window and start the presentation.

As each segment concludes, click on "Next →" at the bottom right of the window.

Write your answers to the following questions on this worksheet.

Once you turn in your library card, it would be a good idea to talk to the librarian. She proposes that Poe died from one of two maladies, list them here:

1.

2.

Open the window for a brief biography of Poe. Read it and answer the following questions:

3. What did Poe's mother do for a living?

4. Who was John Allen?

5. To which branch of the service did Poe enlist?

6. What was the *second* institution of higher learning Poe attended?

7. Where was Poe's first prose tales published?

8. Whom did Poe marry in 1836?

9. Which newspaper did Poe work for upon his arrival in New York?

10. Where is Poe buried?

Close the "Brief Biography" window and open "You'll read about Poe's death."

11. How much money did Bishop Fitzgerald indicate Poe had when he left Richmond?

Drop down to the section of the research entitled “The Cooping Theory”

12 a. What was Ryan’s Fourth Ward Polls?

12 b. What was Cooping?

12 c. Who sent the author of *The Poe Cult* the information the Poe had been seen “...in the coop.”?

Close the reading window and proceed to the Next part of the presentation.

Read the clipping from the Baltimore *Clipper*.

13 a. What was “congestion of the brain”?

Read the clipping from the Baltimore *Sun*.

13 b. What does the phrase "... native of this state," mean? Is the phrase accurate?

14. List the headings of the individual files in the Poe's Death section of the filing cabinet:

A.

E.

B.

F.

C.

G.

D.

H.

Open the file that is labeled "New Theory – Cats," and read the contents.

15. What is a classic symptom of rabies?

16. In 'Poe's opinions of cats,' what does he indicate bigger boys do to cats?

Return to files and open the file marked "Alcoholism."

17. What are the names of the two doctors who made statements about Poe's death?

Return to files and open the file marked "Gas Lighting."

18. In terms of their appearance, what did Poe and President Lincoln have in common?

Return to files and open the file marked "In His Brain."

19. Why are we not sure that Poe had lesions on his brain?

Return to files and open the file marked "Heart of Poe."

20. What did Poe think about the diagnosis?

Return to files and open the file marked "Consumption."

21. What name do we use for the disease called "Consumption"?

Return to files and open the file marked "Poisoning."

22. What were the two treatments for Cholera in Poe's time?

23. Why was Calomel dangerous?

Return to files and proceed to the next part of the presentation.

24. Listen closely...finish this quote: "In pages old _____"

Submit your choice regarding the cause of Poe's death.

25. What do you believe was the cause of Poe's death?

26. What percentage of people believes his death was the result of foul play?

Have your responses ready to turn in at the beginning of class tomorrow.

If you still have time, return to the main website, enjoy and explore!

Learning Activities

5. The unit then proceeds with readings and discussion of a variety of Poe's works.

6. Students are then provided with access to a fun interactive web search for Poe echoes that culminate in a game of *Jeopardy*. Here are 2 sample answers:

This sports team is named after Poe's most famous poem. In fact, its mascots are named Edgar, Allen, and Poe.

In this classic video game, ghost-like beings are called Poes.

Student responses:

At first, students are wary of the website and worksheet, but the nature of the presentation quickly dispels any resistance. The concentration level exhibited in the room is remarkable and every time I have utilized this plan I have heard innumerable whispered sounds of increased tension and relief from the class. Frisson is realized, and the subsequent readings become enjoyable to consume because students feel empowered by *knowing* what Poe was trying to achieve.





Illinois Learning Standards and Goals

1.B.5a Relate reading to prior knowledge and experience and make connections to related information.

1.B.5b Analyze the defining characteristics and structures of a variety of complex literary genres and describe how genre affects the meaning and function of the texts.

1.B.5c Evaluate a variety of compositions for purpose, structure, content and details for use in school or at work.

1.B.5d Read age-appropriate material with fluency and accuracy.

1.C.5a Use questions and predictions to guide reading across complex materials.

1.C.5c Critically evaluate information from multiple sources.

1.C.5d Summarize and make generalizations from content and relate them to the purpose of the material.

National Educational Technology Standards (NETS•S) and Performance Indicators for Students

3. Research and Information Fluency

Students apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information. Students:

- b. locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media.
- c. evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks.
- d. process data and report results.

4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

Students use critical thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources. Students:

- a. identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation.
- b. plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project.
- c. collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions.