

Edgar Allen Poe

- Poe wrote that a story should achieve a “certain unique or single effect...in the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design.”
- What is Gothic? (p. 264)
 - comes from an architectural style of the late Middle Ages in Europe
 - describes a kind of romantic, scary novel that sprang up in Germany in the late 1700’s and early 1800’s
 - summon the mysterious atmosphere suggested by old castles and cathedrals, whose dank dungeons and secret passageways might have witnessed any number of sinister or supernatural events.
- Gothic novel: includes any fiction that created a haunting atmosphere and included strange and macabre events, such as live burials, horrifying tortures, mesmerism (hypnotism), and resurrection of corpses.
- Poe said that the boarding school to which the Allans sent him in Stoke Newington, England, inspired the setting for “The Fall of the House of Usher.”

p.264: Quote—stresses the sensitivity of the human mind and emotions, an important theme of the story.

1. Identify alliteration in the first sentence:

- _____ effect:
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. When the narrator first sees “the melancholy House of Usher,” how does he feel?

3. What descriptions establish the dreary and oppressive atmosphere?

_____ walls, _____ windows, _____ sedges, _____ of _____ trees

4. For the Romantics, the sublime was a powerful experience that overwhelms human emotion and perception, such as a magnificent scene or event in nature or a great work of art. Because Romantics viewed feeling as the most essential human characteristic, they prized works that inspired such intense peaks of emotion and imagination. Note the Usher home is devoid of the sublime.

5. In what does the narrator see the reflection of the house?

6. What has brought the narrator to the House of Usher?

7. What “remarkable fact” about the Usher family does the narrator point out? p. 265

8. What are the two meanings of “House of Usher”?

9. When the narrator looks back up at the mansion, what words or phrases convey a strong sense of sickness and death?

10. What details does the narrator notice when looking at the house more closely?

- minute _____ overspread the exterior
- _____ condition of individual stones
- barely perceptible _____, extending from top to bottom

(p. 267) Inside the house

- Gothic archway
- dark and intricate passages
- somber tapestries
- ebon blackness of floor
- phantasmagoric armorial trophies

11. Describe the physician.

12. Describe the room where the narrator finally encounters Usher.

13. What is the narrator's reaction to the sight of Usher?

14. Describe Roderick Usher's appearance.

- _____ of complexion
- an eye _____, _____, and _____
- lips somewhat _____ and very _____
- nose of a _____ Hebrew model
- chin-- _____ molded with _____ of prominence
- hair of a more _____ softness and _____
- inordinate _____ above the temples

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15. Describe Usher's behavior.

- an _____, _____ agitation
- action alternately _____ and _____
- voice -- _____ indecision or energetic _____
- morbid _____ of the senses
 - most _____ food was only tolerable
 - only wear garments of certain texture
 - odors of all _____ were oppressive
 - eyes tortured by _____ light
 - only a few sounds (stringed instruments) were tolerable

16. What does Usher say he fears most?

17. What “singular feature” of Usher’s mental condition does the narrator discover?

18. What other circumstance afflicts Usher’s spirit?

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19. What effect does Madeline’s passing by have on the narrator? on Usher?

20. Describe Madeline’s illness.

21. How does the narrator try to cheer Usher?

22. What might Usher’s “wild improvisations” of his guitar symbolize?

23. What atmosphere is created by the narrator’s long descriptions of Roderick’s reading, painting, and music?

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24. What picture does Roderick paint?

25. What song does he write and what is it about?

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26. What belief does Roderick hold about the house? How does the narrator feel about this theory?

27. Note the footnote on the bottom of p. 271 that explains Poe’s allusions to various books. How does this contribute to the Gothic nature of the story?

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28. After Madeline dies, why does Roderick say he wants to bury her in the house’s vault?

29. What does the narrator notice about Madeline’s appearance?

- _____ between brother and sister
- _____ upon the bosom and face
- Suspiciously lingering _____

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30. How does Roderick change after Madeline’s burial? What might this suggest?

31. The narrator says he thought Usher was “laboring with some oppressive secret.” What do you think the secret could be?

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32. What details heighten the suspense about a week after Madeline's death?

33. What does the storm symbolize?

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34. How does the narrator try to calm Usher?

35. How does Mad Trist parallel with the main story?

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36. How does Usher's behavior change?

37. What does Usher fear?

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38. What happens?

39. What is the narrator's response?

40. When the narrator looks back, what does he see?