



SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD

Literary Analysis

Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.7 Analyze, interpret, and evaluate an author's use of descriptive language (e.g., tone, irony, mood, imagery, pun, alliteration, onomatopoeia, allusion), figurative language (e.g., symbolism, metaphor, personification, hyperbole),...

NOTABLE QUOTE

*"All that we see or seem,
is but a dream within a dream."*

FYI

Did you know that Edgar Allan Poe ...

- invented the modern detective story?
- inspired the name of the Baltimore Ravens football team?
- briefly wrote a literary gossip column?
- publicly denounced the work of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow?

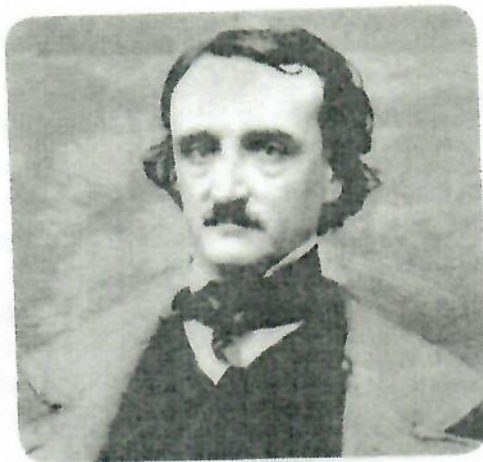
Author Online

For more on Edgar Allan Poe, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.

Baltimore, Maryland, scene of Poe's mysterious death

The Fall of the House of Usher

Short Story by Edgar Allan Poe



Edgar Allan Poe

c. 1809–1849

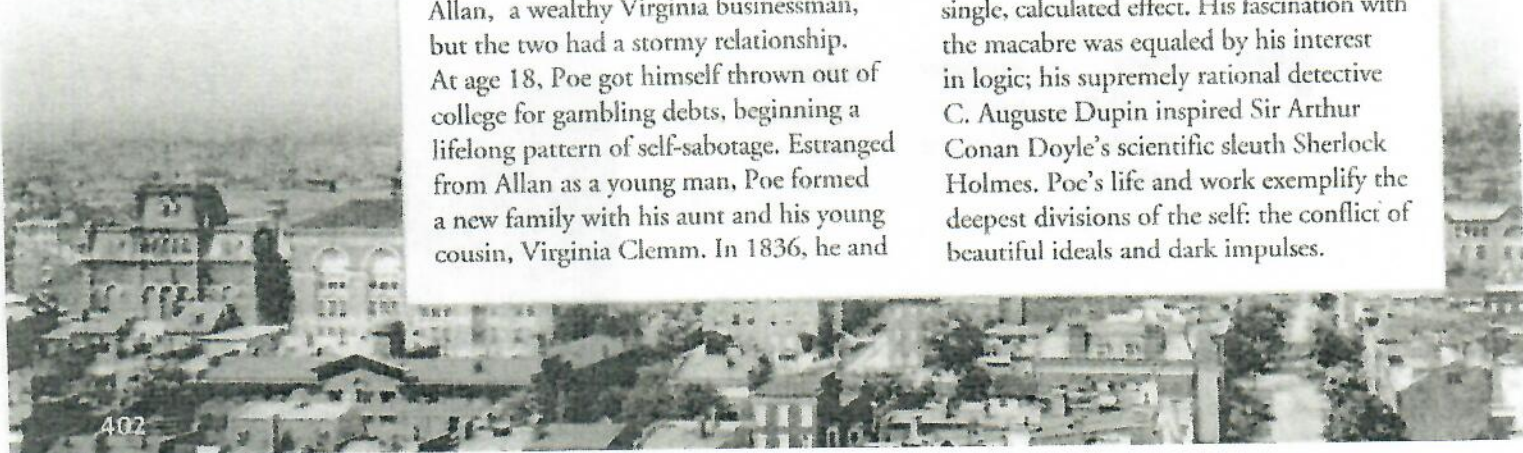
"The Raven" has been called the best-known poem in American literature; "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a masterpiece of Gothic horror. Both of these works were the creation of one feverish imagination, that of poet, critic, and fiction innovator Edgar Allan Poe.

Haunted by Death Once called one of literature's "most brilliant, but erratic, stars," Poe is as well-known for his unstable life as for his formidable talent. Abandoned by his father as an infant, Poe lost his mother to tuberculosis by the age of 3. He was taken in by John Allan, a wealthy Virginia businessman, but the two had a stormy relationship. At age 18, Poe got himself thrown out of college for gambling debts, beginning a lifelong pattern of self-sabotage. Estranged from Allan as a young man, Poe formed a new family with his aunt and his young cousin, Virginia Clemm. In 1836, he and

Virginia married publicly, although they had probably married in secret the year before, when she was only 13. She died 11 years later, and the devastated Poe died 2 years after. Theories about the cause of his death range from alcohol poisoning to brain lesions to rabies.

Making Ends Meet For much of his adult life, Poe struggled to support his family. He landed promising positions at a series of literary magazines, spoiling one opportunity after another with his erratic behavior. At the same time, his scathing reviews made him a feared and respected critic, and his inventive short stories brought him acclaim. Although his life matched the Romantic ideal of the starving artist who suffered for the purity of his art, Poe's stories were designed to reach a wide audience. His successes with horror, science fiction, and detective stories proved his mastery of popular genres.

Tortured Soul Poe's distinctive themes included madness, untimely death, and obsession. Given his troubled life, many critics have interpreted Poe's deranged narrators as reflections of the author's own state of mind. But Poe was a brilliant and controlled stylist, whose theories of art championed rigorous structure, careful use of language, and the masterful creation of a single, calculated effect. His fascination with the macabre was equaled by his interest in logic; his supremely rational detective C. Auguste Dupin inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's scientific sleuth Sherlock Holmes. Poe's life and work exemplify the deepest divisions of the self: the conflict of beautiful ideals and dark impulses.



Where does
TERROR begin?

KEY IDEA Fear can be a reasonable response to an immediate danger, like the instant alarm you would feel upon seeing a car racing toward you. But some of the things we find most terrifying don't present any real threat. A strange noise in the night, a creepy phone call, a creaking door slowly opening—what makes us afraid of things that can't really hurt us?

QUICKWRITE Recall times when you were frightened for no good reason: a walk in a familiar place that seemed strangely spooky or a sudden paranoia about being home alone. Describe what triggered your fear and why. How much of your terror was the result of your own imagination?

LITERARY ANALYSIS: UNITY OF EFFECT

Some writers insist that plot or character drives a story. Edgar Allan Poe wanted his stories to achieve a **unity of effect**, where every element—plot, character, setting, and imagery—helped create a single effect, or **mood**, as in this opening sentence from the selection:

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low . . .

The ominous details set a scene of instant gloom. As you read, note the choices Poe makes to achieve his intended effect.

READING SKILL: UNDERSTAND COMPLEX SENTENCES

Poe's sentences have a nervous, excited quality: they pile on details and jump from one subject to another. Use these strategies to help you understand Poe's complex sentences:

- Focus on the main idea. Finding the main subject and verb of a sentence can help you identify its main idea.
- Break long sentences into shorter ones that focus on one idea. Group modifiers with the words they describe.
- Keep reading. Poe often restates ideas, and a confusing sentence might be followed by one easier to understand.

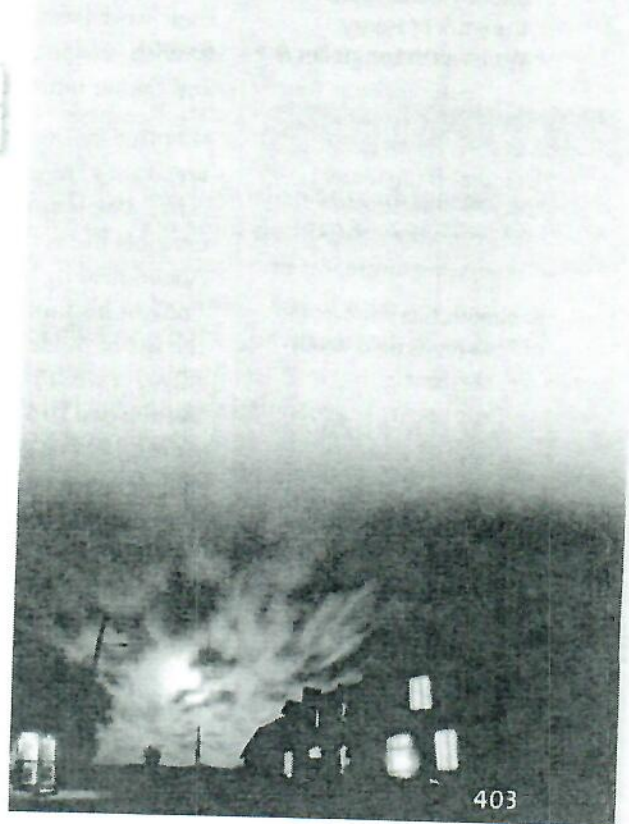
Apply these strategies as you read. Using a chart like the one shown, paraphrase five especially complex sentences.

Line Numbers for Poe's Sentence	My Paraphrase

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Poe was fascinated with unusual language. Review the vocabulary words, noting any familiar roots, prefixes, or suffixes that might help you unlock the meanings of the words.

WORD LIST	affinity	demeanor	insipid
	alleviation	equivocal	pertinacity
	anomaly	inordinate	vagary
	apathy		



THE FALL OF THE House of Usher

Edgar Allan Poe

*Son coeur est un luth suspendu;
Sîtôt qu'on le touche il résonne.*

—De Béranger

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked
10 upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant, eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller

"His heart is a hanging lute: / As soon as one touches it, it sounds" (lines from a poem by the 19th-century French poet Pierre Jean de Béranger).

ANALYZE VISUALS

What mood does this image convey? Identify specific elements, such as color, texture, and composition, that contribute to this mood.

12 rank sedges: overgrown grassy plants.

upon opium—the bitter lapse into everyday life—the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it—I paused to think—
20 Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression; and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed
30 down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodelled and inverted images of the grey sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows. **A**

Nevertheless, in this mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn of some weeks. Its proprietor, Roderick Usher, had been one of my boon companions in boyhood; but many years had elapsed since our last meeting. A letter, however, had lately reached me in a distant part of the country—a letter from him—which, in its wildly importunate nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply. The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of acute bodily illness—of a mental
40 disorder which oppressed him—and of an earnest desire to see me, as his best, and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some **alleviation** of his malady. It was the manner in which all this, and much more, was said—it was the apparent *heart* that went with his request—which allowed me no room for hesitation; and I accordingly obeyed forthwith what I still considered a very singular summons.

Although, as boys, we had been even intimate associates, yet I really knew little of my friend. His reserve had been always excessive and habitual. I was aware, however, that his very ancient family had been noted, time
50 out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through long ages, in many works of exalted art, and manifested, of late, in repeated deeds of munificent yet unobtrusive charity, as well as in a passionate devotion to the intricacies, perhaps even more than to the orthodox and easily recognizable beauties, of musical science. I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain. It was this

28–29 precipitous . . . tarn: steep bank of a small black, repulsive-looking mountain lake.

A UNITY OF EFFECT

Reread lines 16–32. Describe the **mood** of the scene. What details of the narrator's reactions contribute to this effect?

38 had admitted of no other than: had required; MS.: an abbreviation of *manuscript*.

alleviation (ə-lē'vē-ā'shən)
n. relief

52 munificent yet unobtrusive: generous yet inconspicuous.

deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping
60 of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people,
and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the
long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other—it was this
deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating
transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at
length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the
quaint and **equivocal** appellation of the “House of Usher”—an appellation
which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both
the family and the family mansion. **B**

I have said that the sole effect of my somewhat childish experiment—that
70 of looking down within the tarn—had been to deepen the first singular
impression. There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase
of my superstition—for why should I not so term it?—served mainly to
accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of
all sentiments having terror as a basis. And it might have been for this reason
only, that, when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image
in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy—a fancy so ridiculous,
indeed, that I but mention it to show the vivid force of the sensations which
oppressed me. I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that
about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar
80 to themselves and their immediate vicinity—an atmosphere which had no
affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed
trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull,
sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued.

Shaking off from my spirit what *must* have been a dream, I scanned
more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature seemed
to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been
great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled
web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary
dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to
90 be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the
crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that
reminded me of the specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted
for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath
of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however,
the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing
observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending
from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a
zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn. **C**

Noticing these things, I rode over a short causeway to the house. A
100 servant in waiting took my horse, and I entered the Gothic archway of the
hall. A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me, in silence, through
many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the *studio* of his master.

62–63 **this deficiency . . . issue:** for some reason, the Ushers have few descendants.

equivocal (ĭ-kwĭv'ə-kəl) *adj.*
ambiguous

- B COMPLEX SENTENCES**
Identify the main idea of lines 62–68. What are the two meanings of the phrase “the House of Usher”?

affinity (ə-fĭn'ĭ-tē) *n.* a kinship or likeness

92 **specious totality:** false appearance of soundness.

96 **fissure:** long narrow crack.

- C GRAMMAR AND STYLE**
Reread lines 95–98. Note how Poe uses the **participle** “scrutinizing” and the **participial phrase** “extending from the roof of the building in front” as modifiers.

Much that I encountered on the way contributed, I know not how, to heighten the vague sentiments of which I have already spoken. While the objects around me—while the carvings of the ceilings, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies which rattled as I strode, were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy—while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this—I still wondered to find how

110 unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up. On one of the staircases, I met the physician of the family. His countenance, I thought, wore a mingled expression of low cunning and perplexity. He accosted me with trepidation and passed on. The valet now threw open a door and ushered me through into the presence of his master.

The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, 120 however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.

Upon my entrance, Usher arose from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with a vivacious warmth which had much in it, I at first thought, of an overdone cordiality—of the constrained effort of the *ennuyé* man of the world. A glance, however, at his countenance 130 convinced me of his perfect sincerity. We sat down; and for some moments, while he spoke not, I gazed upon him with a feeling of half pity, half of awe. Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood. Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its 140 want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity; these features, with an **inordinate** expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten. And now in the mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of these features, and of the expression they were wont to convey, lay so much of change that I doubted to whom I spoke. The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and

106–107 **phantasmagoric**
(fān-tāz'mā-gōr'īk) **armorial trophies**: fantastic wall decorations bearing coats of arms.

121 **vaulted and fretted**: arched and decorated with interlaced designs.

129 **ennuyé** (ān-nwē-yā') *French*: bored.

136 **cadaverousness of complexion**: a corpse-like appearance.

inordinate (īn-ōr'dn-īt) *adj.*
exceeding reasonable limits;
excessive

even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea
150 of simple humanity. **D**

In the manner of my friend I was at once struck with an incoherence—an inconsistency; and I soon found this to arise from a series of feeble and futile struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy—an excessive nervous agitation. For something of this nature I had indeed been prepared, no less by his letter, than by reminiscences of certain boyish traits, and by conclusions deduced from his peculiar physical conformation and temperament. His action was alternately vivacious and sullen. His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision (when the animal spirits seemed utterly in abeyance) to that species of energetic concision—that abrupt,
160 weighty, unhurried, and hollow-sounding enunciation—that leaden, self-balanced, and perfectly modulated guttural utterance, which may be observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement.

It was thus that he spoke of the object of my visit, of his earnest desire to see me, and of the solace he expected me to afford him. He entered, at some length, into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady. It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy—a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly soon pass off. It displayed itself in a host of unnatural
170 sensations. Some of these, as he detailed them, interested and bewildered me; although, perhaps, the terms and the general manner of their narration had their weight. He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most **insipid** food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror.

To an anomalous species of terror I found him a bounden slave. “I shall perish,” said he, “I *must* perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves,
180 but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect—in terror. In this unnerved—in this pitiable, condition—I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR.” **E**

I learned, moreover, at intervals, and through broken and equivocal hints, another singular feature of his mental condition. He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence, for many years, he had never ventured forth—in
190 regard to an influence whose suppositious force was conveyed in terms too

149 **Arabesque** (ar'ā-bésk'): intricately interwoven, like the design of an Oriental rug.

D UNITY OF EFFECT

Reread lines 132–150. Poe often uses **exaggeration** to add drama to his descriptions. Which details of Roderick's appearance show this technique at work?

159 **concision**: terseness; brevity in use of words.

insipid (ín-sĭp'ĭd) *adj.* lacking in flavor; bland

175 **but peculiar**: only certain.

E COMPLEX SENTENCES

Reread the description of Roderick's state of mind in lines 177–185, and identify the idea that is repeatedly emphasized. What does Roderick seem to be afraid of?

190 **suppositious**: supposed.

shadowy here to be re-stated—an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit—an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the *morale* of his existence.

He admitted, however, although with hesitation, that much of the peculiar gloom which thus afflicted him could be traced to a more natural and far more palpable origin—to the severe and long-continued illness—indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution—of a tenderly beloved
200 sister—his sole companion for long years—his last and only relative on earth. “Her decease,” he said, with a bitterness which I can never forget, “would leave him (him, the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers.” While he spoke, the lady Madeline (for so she was called) passed through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared. I regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread—and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings. A sensation of stupor oppressed me as my eyes followed her retreating steps. When a door, at length, closed upon her, my glance sought instinctively and eagerly the countenance of the brother—but he had buried
210 his face in his hands, and I could only perceive that a far more than ordinary wanness had overspread the emaciated fingers through which trickled many passionate tears.

The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled **apathy**, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character were the unusual diagnosis. Hitherto she had steadily borne up against the pressure of her malady, and had not betaken herself finally to bed; but on the closing in of the evening of my arrival at the house, she succumbed (as her brother told me at night with inexpressible agitation) to the prostrating
220 power of the destroyer; and I learned that the glimpse I had obtained of her person would thus probably be the last I should obtain—that the lady, at least while living, would be seen by me no more.

For several days ensuing, her name was unmentioned by either Usher or myself; and during this period I was busied in earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. We painted and read together, or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar. And thus, as a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive
230 quality, poured forth upon all the objects of the moral and physical universe in one unceasing radiation of gloom. **F**

I shall ever bear about me a memory of the many solemn hours I thus spent alone with the master of the House of Usher. Yet I should fail in any attempt to convey an idea of the exact character of the studies, or of the

ANALYZE VISUALS

What techniques has the artist used to create contrast between Madeline and the two men?

apathy (äp'ə-thē) *n.* lack of feeling or interest

215 **transient** . . . **cataleptical**
(kät'li-äp'ti-kəl) *character:* temporary episodes of a trancelike condition.

F COMPLEX SENTENCES

Reread lines 226–231. **Paraphrase** this sentence by breaking it into two shorter sentences, each beginning with the word *I*. What has changed in the narrator's relationship with Roderick?

occupations, in which he involved me, or led me the way. An excited and highly distempered ideality threw a sulphureous lustre over all. His long improvised dirges will ring forever in my ears. Among other things, I hold painfully in mind a certain singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the last waltz of Von Weber. From the paintings over which his elaborate fancy brooded, and which grew, touch by touch, into vagueness at which I shuddered the more thrillingly, because I shuddered knowing not why,—from these paintings (vivid as their images now are before me) I would in vain endeavor to educe more than a small portion which should lie within the compass of merely written words. By the utter simplicity, by the nakedness of his designs, he arrested and over-awed attention. If ever mortal painted an ideal, that mortal was Roderick Usher. For me at least—in the circumstances then surrounding me—there arose out of the pure abstractions which the hypochondriac contrived to throw upon his canvas, an intensity of intolerable awe, no shadow of which felt I ever yet in the contemplation of the certainly glowing yet too concrete reveries of Fuseli.

One of the phantasmagoric conceptions of my friend, partaking not so rigidly of the spirit of abstraction, may be shadowed forth, although feebly, in words. A small picture presented the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch or other artificial source of light was discernable; yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendor.

I have just spoken of that morbid condition of the auditory nerve which rendered all music intolerable to the sufferer, with the exception of certain effects of stringed instruments. It was, perhaps, the narrow limits to which he thus confined himself upon the guitar which gave birth, in great measure, to the fantastic character of his performances. But the fervid *facility* of his *impromptus* could not be so accounted for. They must have been, and were, in the notes, as well as in the words of his wild fantasias (for he not unfrequently accompanied himself with rhymed verbal improvisations), the result of that intense mental collectedness and concentration to which I have previously alluded as observable only in particular moments of the highest artificial excitement. The words of one of these rhapsodies I have easily remembered. I was, perhaps, the more forcibly impressed with it as he gave it, because, in the under or mystic current of its meaning, I fancied that I perceived, and for the first time, a full consciousness on the part of Usher of the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne. The verses, which were entitled “The Haunted Palace,” ran very near, if not accurately, thus:—

236 distempered . . . sulphureous (sül-fär'ê-as) **lustre:** diseased creativity gave a nightmarish quality.

239 Von Weber (vön vä'ber): the German romantic composer Karl Maria von Weber (1786–1826).

250 Fuseli (fyöö'zə-lé'): the Swiss-born British painter Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), many of whose works feature fantastic or gruesome elements.

266 impromptus (än-prŏmp-tü'): **French:** musical pieces made up as they are played.

I

*In the greenest of our valleys,
By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace—
Radiant palace—reared its head.
In the monarch Thought's dominion—
It stood there!
Never seraph spread a pinion
Over fabric half so fair.*

II

*Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
On its roof did float and flow;
(This—all this—was in the olden
Time long ago)
And every gentle air that dallied,
In that sweet day,
Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,
A winged odor went away.*

III

*Wanderers in that happy valley
Through two luminous windows saw
Spirits moving musically
To a lute's well-tuned law,
Round about a throne, where sitting
(Porphyrogene!)
In state his glory well befitting,
The ruler of the realm was seen.*

IV

*And all with pearl and ruby glowing
Was the fair palace door,
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing
And sparkling evermore,
A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty
Was but to sing,
In voices of surpassing beauty,
The wit and wisdom of their king.*

283–284 *Never seraph* (sèr'af) . . .
half so fair; No angel ever spread
its wing over half so beautiful a
structure.

298 *Porphyrogene* (pór-fir'ə-jèn'):
a son born to a ruling king.

V

310

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
 Assailed the monarch's high estate;
 (Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
 Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)
 And, round about his home, the glory
 That blushed and bloomed
 Is but a dim-remembered story
 Of the old time entombed.

VI

320

And travellers now within that valley,
 Through the red-litten windows see
 Vast forms that move fantastically
 To a discordant melody;
 While, like a rapid ghastly river,
 Through the pale door,
 A hideous throng rush out forever,
 And laugh—but smile no more.

I well remember that suggestions arising from this ballad led us into a train of thought wherein there became manifest an opinion of Usher's which I mention not so much on account of its novelty (for other men have thought thus), as on account of the **pertinacity** with which he maintained it. This opinion, in its general form, was that of the sentience of all vegetable things. But, in his disordered fancy, the idea had assumed a more daring character, and trespassed, under certain conditions, upon the kingdom of inorganization. I lack words to express the full extent, of the earnest *abandon* of his persuasion. The belief, however, was connected (as I have previously hinted) with the gray stones of the home of his forefathers. The conditions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones—in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many *fungi* which overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around—above all, in the long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn. Its evidence—the evidence of the sentience—was to be seen, he said (and I here stared as he spoke), in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls. The result was discoverable, he added, in that silent yet importunate and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of his family, and which made *him* what I now saw him—what he was. Such opinions need no comment, and I will make none.

Our books—the books which, for years, had formed no small portion of the mental existence of the invalid—were, as might be supposed, in strict keeping with this character of phantasm. We pored together over such works

pertinacity (pŭr'tn-ăs'ĭ-tē) *n.*
 stubbornness; persistence

329–330 **sentience** (sĕn'shĕns) of all
 vegetable things: consciousness of
 all growing things.

350 as the Ververt et Chartreuse of Gresset; the Belphegor of Machiavelli; the Heaven and Hell of Swedenborg; the Subterranean Voyage of Nicholas Klimm by Holberg; the Chiromancy of Robert Flud, of Jean D'Indaginé, and of De la Chambre; the Journey into the Blue Distance of Tieck; and the City of the Sun of Campanella. Our favorite volume was a small octavo edition of the *Directorium Inquisitorium*, by the Dominican Eymeric de Gironne; and there were passages in Pomponius Mela, about the old African Satyrs and Aegipans, over which Usher would sit dreaming for hours. His chief delight, however, was found in the perusal of an exceedingly rare and curious book in quarto Gothic—the manual of a forgotten church—the

360 *Vigiliae Mortuorum secundum Chorum Ecclesiae Maguntinae*.

I could not help thinking of the wild ritual of this work, and of its probable influence upon the hypochondriac, when, one evening, having informed me abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more, he stated his intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight (previously to its final interment), in one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building. The worldly reason, however, assigned for this singular proceeding, was one which I did not feel at liberty to dispute. The brother had been led to his resolution (so he told me) by consideration of the unusual character of the malady of the deceased, of certain obtrusive and eager inquiries on the part of her medical men, and of the remote and exposed situation of the

370 burial-ground of the family. I will not deny that when I called to mind the sinister countenance of the person whom I met upon the staircase, on the day of my arrival at the house, I had no desire to oppose what I regarded as at best but a harmless, and by no means an unnatural, precaution.

At the request of Usher, I personally aided him in the arrangements for the temporary entombment. The body having been encoffined, we two alone bore it to its rest. The vault in which we placed it (and which had been so long unopened that our torches, half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere, gave us little opportunity for investigation) was small, damp,

380 and entirely without means of admission for light; lying, at great depth, immediately beneath that portion of the building in which was my own sleeping apartment. It had been used, apparently, in remote feudal times, for the worst purposes of a donjonkeep, and, in later days, as a place of deposit for powder, or some other highly combustible substance, as a portion of its floor, and the whole interior of a long archway through which we reached it, were carefully sheathed with copper. The door, of massive iron, had been, also, similarly protected. Its immense weight caused an unusually sharp, grating sound, as it moved upon its hinges. ©

Having deposited our mournful burden upon tressels within this region

390 of horror, we partially turned aside the yet unscrewed lid of the coffin, and looked upon the face of the tenant. A striking similitude between the brother and sister now first arrested my attention; and Usher, divining, perhaps, my thoughts, murmured out some few words from which I learned

350–356 Ververt et Chartreuse
... Pomponius Mela: extravagantly
imaginative works of fiction,
theology, philosophy, and geography.

360 *Vigiliae Mortuorum secundum
Chorum Ecclesiae Maguntinae* Latin:
Wakes for the Dead, in the Manner
of the Choir of the Church of Mainz.

364–365 for a fortnight ...
interment: for two weeks prior to its
final burial.

383 donjonkeep (dón'jən-kēō):
dungeon.

© UNITY OF EFFECT
Reread lines 377–388. Why might
Poe have provided so much detail
about the structure of the vault?

that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them. Our glances, however, rested not long upon the dead—for we could not regard her unawed. The disease which had thus entombed the lady in the maturity of her youth, had left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and
400 that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death. We replaced and screwed down the lid, and, having secured the door of iron, made our way, with toil, into the scarcely less gloomy apartments of the upper portion of the house.

And now, some days of bitter grief having elapsed, an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder of my friend. His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step. The pallor of his countenance had assumed, if possible, a more
410 ghastly hue—but the luminousness of his eye had utterly gone out. The once occasional huskiness of his tone was heard no more; and a tremulous quaver, as if of extreme terror, habitually characterized his utterance. There were times, indeed, when I thought his unceasingly agitated mind was laboring with some oppressive secret, to divulge which he struggled for the necessary courage. At times, again, I was obliged to resolve all into the mere inexplicable vagaries of madness, for I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours, in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound. It was no wonder that his condition terrified—that it infected me. I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions.

420 It was, especially, upon retiring to bed late in the night of the seventh or eighth day after the placing of the lady Madeline within the donjon, that I experienced the full power of such feelings. Sleep came not near my couch—while the hours waned and waned away. I struggled to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over me. I endeavored to believe that much, if not all of what I felt, was due to the bewildering influence of the gloomy furniture of the room—of the dark and tattered draperies, which, tortured into motion by the breath of a rising tempest, swayed fitfully to and fro upon the walls, and rustled uneasily about the decorations of the bed. But my efforts were fruitless. An irrepressible tremor gradually pervaded
430 my frame; and, at length, there sat upon my very heart an incubus of utterly causeless alarm. Shaking this off with a gasp and a struggle, I uplifted myself upon the pillows, and, peering earnestly within the intense darkness of the chamber, hearkened—I know not why, except that an instinctive spirit prompted me—to certain low and indefinite sounds which came, through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, I knew not whence. Overpowered by an intense sentiment of horror, unaccountable yet unendurable, I threw on my clothes with haste (for I felt that I should sleep no more during the night), and endeavored to arouse myself from the pitiable condition into which I had fallen, by pacing rapidly to and fro through the apartment. **H**

vagary (vā'gə-rē) *n.* strange idea

423 **couch**: bed.

430 **Incubus**: something that burdens like a nightmare.

H **COMPLEX SENTENCES**
Reread lines 431–435. Identify the main subject and verb of the sentence. Which participial phrases modify this subject?

440 I had taken but a few turns in this manner, when a light step on an adjoining staircase arrested my attention. I presently recognized it as that of Usher. In an instant afterward he rapped, with a gentle touch, at my door, and entered, bearing a lamp. His countenance was, as usual, cadaverously wan—but, moreover, there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes—an evidently restrained *hysteria* in his whole **demeanor**. His air appalled me—but any thing was preferable to the solitude which I had so long endured, and I even welcomed his presence as a relief.

demeanor (dī-mē'nər) *n.*
behavior

“And you have not seen it?” he said abruptly, after having stared about him for some moments in silence—“you have not then seen it?—but, stay!
450 you shall.” Thus speaking, and having carefully shaded his lamp, he hurried to one of the casements, and threw it freely open to the storm.

The impetuous fury of the entering gust nearly lifted us from our feet. It was, indeed, a tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night, and one wildly singular in its terror and its beauty. A whirlwind had apparently collected its force in our vicinity; for there were frequent and violent alterations in the direction of the wind; and the exceeding density of the clouds (which hung so low as to press upon the turrets of the house) did not prevent our perceiving the lifelike velocity with which they flew careering from all points
460 their exceeding density did not prevent our perceiving this—yet we had no glimpse of the moon or stars, nor was there any flashing forth of lightning. But the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapor, as well as the terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion.

458 **careering**: going at top speed.

462–463 **huge masses . . . terrestrial objects**: the huge, fast-moving clouds, as well as the objects on the ground.

“You must not—you shall not behold this!” said I, shuddering, to Usher, as I led him, with a gentle violence, from the window to a seat. “These appearances, which bewilder you, are merely electrical phenomena not uncommon—or it may be that they have their ghastly origin in the rank
470 miasma of the tarn. Let us close this casement;—the air is chilling and dangerous to your frame. Here is one of your favorite romances. I will read, and you shall listen;—and so we will pass away this terrible night together.”

470 **miasma** (mī-āz'mə): poisonous vapors.

The antique volume which I had taken up was the “Mad Trist” of Sir Launcelot Canning; but I had called it a favorite of Usher’s more in sad jest than in earnest; for, in truth, there is little in its uncouth and unimaginative prolixity which could have had interest for the lofty and spiritual ideality of my friend. It was, however, the only book immediately at hand; and I indulged a vague hope that the excitement which now agitated the hypochondriac, might find relief (for the history of mental disorder is full of
480 similar **anomalies**) even in the extremeness of the folly which I should read. Could I have judged, indeed, by the wild overstrained air of vivacity with which he hearkened, or apparently hearkened, to the words of the tale, I might well have congratulated myself upon the success of my design.

475–476 **uncouth . . . prolixity** (prōlīk'si-tē): clumsy and unimaginative wordiness.

anomaly (ə-nŏm'ə-lē) *n.*
departure from the normal rules

I had arrived at that well-known portion of the story where Ethelred, the hero of the *Trist*, having sought in vain for peaceable admission into the dwelling of the hermit, proceeds to make good an entrance by force. Here, it will be remembered, the words of the narrative run thus:

“And Ethelred, who was by nature of a doughty heart, and who was now mighty withal, on account of the powerfulness of the wine which he had drunken, waited no longer to hold parley with the hermit, who, in
490 sooth, was of an obstinate and malicious turn, but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders, and fearing the rising of the tempest, uplifted his mace outright, and, with blows, made quickly room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand; and now pulling therewith sturdily, he so cracked, and ripped, and tore all asunder, that the noise of the dry and hollow-sounding wood alarumed and reverberated throughout the forest.”

492–494 uplifted his mace . . . gauntleted hand: raised his spiked club and cut a space in the door for his armored, gloved hand.

At the termination of this sentence I started and, for a moment, paused; for it appeared to me (although I at once concluded that my excited fancy had deceived me)—it appeared to me that, from some very remote portion
500 of the mansion, there came, indistinctly, to my ears, what might have been, in its exact similarity of character, the echo (but a stifled and dull one certainly) of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described. It was, beyond doubt, the coincidence alone which had arrested my attention; for, amid the rattling of the sashes of the casements, and the ordinary commingled noises of the still increasing storm, the sound, in itself, had nothing, surely, which should have interested or disturbed me. I continued the story:

“But the good champion Ethelred, now entering within the door, was sore enraged and amazed to perceive no signal of the malicious hermit;
510 but, in the stead thereof, a dragon of scaly and prodigious demeanor, and of a fiery tongue, which sate in guard before a palace of gold, with a floor of silver; and upon the wall there hung a shield of shining brass with this legend enwritten—

*Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath bin;
Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win;*

And Ethelred uplifted his mace, and struck upon the head of the dragon, which fell before him, and gave up his pesty breath, with a shriek so horrid and harsh, and withal so piercing, that Ethelred had fain to close his ears with his hands against the dreadful noise of it, the like whereof was never
520 before heard.”

517 pesty: poisonous.

Here again I paused abruptly, and now with a feeling of wild amazement—for there could be no doubt whatever that, in this instance, I did actually hear (although from what direction it proceeded I found it impossible to say) a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound—the exact counterpart of what

my fancy had conjured up for the dragon's unnatural shriek as described by the romancer. ❶

Oppressed, as I certainly was, upon the occurrence of this second and most extraordinary coincidence, by a thousand conflicting sensations, in which wonder and extreme terror were predominant, I still retained
530 sufficient presence of mind to avoid exciting, by any observation, the sensitive nervousness of my companion. I was by no means certain that he had noticed the sounds in question; although, assuredly, a strange alteration had, during the last few minutes, taken place in his demeanor. From a position fronting my own, he had gradually brought round his chair, so as to sit with his face to the door of the chamber; and thus I could but partially perceive his features, although I saw that his lips trembled as if he were murmuring inaudibly. His head had dropped upon his breast—yet I knew that he was not asleep, from the wide and rigid opening of the eye as I
540 caught a glance of it in profile. The motion of his body, too, was at variance with this idea—for he rocked from side to side with a gentle yet constant and uniform sway. Having rapidly taken notice of all this, I resumed the narrative of Sir Launcelot, which thus proceeded:

“And now, the champion, having escaped from the terrible fury of the dragon, bethinking himself of the brazen shield, and of the breaking up of the enchantment which was upon it, removed the carcass from out of the way before him, and approached valorously over the silver pavement of the castle to where the shield was upon the wall; which in sooth tarried not for his full coming, but fell down at his feet upon the silver floor, with a mighty
550 great and terrible ringing sound.”

No sooner had these syllables passed my lips, than—as if a shield of brass had indeed, at the moment, fallen heavily upon a floor of silver—I became aware of a distinct, hollow, metallic, and clangorous, yet apparently muffled, reverberation. Completely unnerved, I leaped to my feet; but the measured rocking movement of Usher was undisturbed. I rushed to the chair in which he sat. His eyes were bent fixedly before him, and throughout his whole countenance there reigned a stony rigidity. But, as I placed my hand upon his shoulder, there came a strong shudder over his whole person; a sickly smile quivered about his lips; and I saw that he spoke in a low, hurried, and
560 gibbering murmur, as if unconscious of my presence. Bending closely over him, I at length drank in the hideous import of his words.

“Not hear it?—yes, I hear it, and *have* heard it. Long—long—long—many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it—yet I dared not—oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am!—I dared not—I *dared* not speak! *We have put her living in the tomb!* Said I not that my senses were acute? I *now* tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them—many, many days ago—yet I dared not—I *dared not speak!* And now—to-night—Ethelred—ha ha!—the breaking of the hermit's door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangor of the shield!—say, rather, the

❶ **UNITY OF EFFECT**
Reread lines 521–527. What coincidence is repeated?

570 rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! Oh! whither shall I fly? Will she not be here anon? Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? Have I not heard her footstep on the stair? Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? MADMAN!"—here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables, as if in the effort he were giving up his soul—"MADMAN! I TELL YOU THAT SHE NOW STANDS WITHOUT THE DOOR!"

As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell, the huge antique panels to which the speaker pointed threw slowly back, upon the instant, their ponderous and ebony jaws. It was the work of the rushing gust—but then without those doors there did stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold—then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.

From the chamber, and from that mansion, I fled aghast. The storm was still abroad in all its wrath as I found myself crossing the old causeway. Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light, and I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued; for the vast house and its shadows were alone behind me. The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon, which now shone vividly through that once barely discernible fissure, of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base. While I gazed, the fissure rapidly widened—there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind—the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight—my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "HOUSE OF USHER."

UNITY OF EFFECT

Reread lines 568–571. Recall the description of the vault you read earlier. In what way does that description help set up the situation of the story's climax?

ANALYZE VISUALS

Compare the image on page 423 with the description in lines 581–587. Is the artist's interpretation of the scene effective? Why or why not?



SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD

Literary Analysis

Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.7 Analyze, interpret, and evaluate an author's use of descriptive language (e.g., tone, irony, mood, imagery, pun, alliteration, onomatopoeia, allusion), figurative language (e.g., symbolism, metaphor, personification, hyperbole),...

Comprehension

- 1. Recall** Why does the narrator come to the House of Usher?
- 2. Recall** What change in Madeline's condition occurs shortly after the narrator's arrival?
- 3. Clarify** What are Roderick's reasons for placing Madeline in the vault below the house?

Literary Analysis

- 4. Examine Complex Sentences** Review the chart you created as you read. Compare your paraphrases with Poe's original sentences. Without Poe's elaborate language, does the story have the same **mood**? Explain.
- 5. Draw Conclusions about Point of View** Explain what each of the following reveals about the narrator's changing response to the house and its inhabitants. How does Poe's use of the first-person point of view help communicate the experience of **terror**?
 - the narrator's response to the house (lines 63–83)
 - his opinion of Roderick (lines 186–195)
 - Roderick's influence on the narrator (lines 417–419)
 - his efforts to calm his own fears (lines 423–431)
- 6. Interpret Title** Reread lines 58–68. Based on this passage, explain two possible meanings of the story's title. In what ways does the title help you anticipate the ending of the story?
- 7. Analyze Unity of Effect** In what way does each of the following demonstrate Poe's principle of the single effect? Cite key details that show Poe's use of the specified story element to build **mood**.
 - setting (lines 115–125)
 - character traits (lines 172–176)
 - plot developments (lines 216–222)
 - imagery (lines 452–465)
- 8. Evaluate Author's Technique** In your opinion, does Poe's technique of the unified effect accomplish its intended purpose? What, if any, are the disadvantages of his approach? Explain.

Literary Criticism

- 9. Critical Interpretations** The literary critic Cleanth Brooks dismissed "The Fall of the House of Usher" as an "essentially meaningless" exercise in horror for its own sake. Considering your own reading of the story, do you agree or disagree with this opinion? Cite details to support your answer.

Reading-Writing Connection

WRITING PROMPT

WRITE A DESCRIPTION You don't need far-off locales and crumbling castles to inspire **terror**. Using a few well-chosen details, you can turn a familiar scene into an unsettling backdrop for eerie events.

Write a **two-to-four paragraph description** that makes an everyday location seem terrifying. Choose descriptive details that suggest something strange or unsettling is at work.

SELF-CHECK

A successful description will . . .

- involve an appropriate setting
- establish an unusual situation
- ▶ contain evocative details that convey a strong sense of mood

GRAMMAR AND STYLE

ADD DESCRIPTIVE DETAILS Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 407. Poe is a master of elaborate, ornate descriptions that are packed with details. Some of his descriptive words are **participles**, verb forms that function as adjectives, as in this example:

His long improvised dirges will ring forever in my ears. (lines 236–237)

Participles usually end in **-ing** or **-ed** and can be combined with modifiers and complements to make **participial phrases**.

PRACTICE Read each of the following sentences from Poe's story, noting the boldfaced participle or participial phrase. Then, write your own sentence, using a participle as instructed in parentheses. An example has been done for you.

EXAMPLE

His countenance, I thought, wore a **mingled** expression of low cunning and perplexity. (Use a past participle, one that ends with **-ed**.)

*The cat, I noticed, carried a **mangled** mouse in her jaws.*

1. A sensation of stupor oppressed me as my eyes followed her **retreating** steps. (Use a present participle, one that ends with **-ing**.)
2. **Shaking off from my spirit what *must* have been a dream**, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. (Use a participial phrase to begin your sentence. Make sure your phrase modifies the subject.)
3. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, **hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves**. (Use a participial phrase at the end of your sentence. Make sure the phrase modifies the subject.)



SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD

Writing Process

Benchmark LA.1112.3.3.3 Creating precision and interest by elaborating ideas through supporting details (e.g., facts, statistics, expert opinions, anecdotes), a variety of sentence structures, creative language devices, and modifying word choices using resources and reference materials (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus) to select more effective and precise language.



WRITING TOOLS

For prewriting, revision, and editing tools, visit the **Writing Center** at ClassZone.com.

