

# The Raven

Poem by  
Edgar Allan Poe



LA.1112.1.7.3,  
LA.1112.2.1.7

## LITERARY ANALYSIS: SOUND DEVICES

First published in 1845, “The Raven” became an instant hit. Part of the poem’s popularity was due to Poe’s clever use of **sound devices**, patterns of word sounds used to create musical effects.

- **Rhyme**, the repetition of similar sounds, is one of the easiest sound devices to spot. Poe adds variety by using **internal rhyme**, rhyming words that fall inside a line.

*Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;*

- **Repetition**, of rhymes and of words and phrases, helps give “The Raven” its distinctive rhythm.

*As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.*

- **Alliteration**, the repetition of initial consonant sounds, is used to create rhythm or to stress key words.

*While I nodded, nearly napping . . .*

- **Onomatopoeia** is the use of words that sound like their meaning, such as the word *rustling* in this example:

*And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain*

As you read, note how Poe combines these sound devices to form complex rhythmic patterns. Reading aloud will help you appreciate Poe’s ingenious use of sound effects.

**Review: Stanza and Rhyme Scheme**

## READING SKILL: MAKE INFERENCES

“The Raven” tells a story without directly stating all of the important details. You’ll need to use clues in the poem to **make inferences** about the speaker’s situation as the poem opens and about his state of mind during the events of the poem. As you read, use a chart like the one shown to record your inferences and the clues that helped you. By the end of the poem, you’ll be able to **draw conclusions** about what the speaker experiences.

	Inferences About the Speaker	Clues
State of Mind		
Recent Experiences		

Explore the  
Key Idea

FLORIDA

## How do people handle LOSS?

**KEY IDEA** At some point in our lives, we all face loss—of someone we love, our favorite pet, or even a cherished dream. But even though the experience of loss is universal, people can choose many different ways to cope with the sadness and **grief** they feel. What do people need to do to face their grief and move on?

**DISCUSS** Working in small groups, think about some ways people respond to a serious loss. Discuss how they express their own feelings and what they do to adjust to the changes that the loss creates. What patterns can you identify?



The  
*Raven*  
Edgar Allan Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.  
5 “Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—  
Only this and nothing more.” **A**

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.  
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow  
10 From my books surcease<sup>1</sup> of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—  
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Nameless *here* forevermore. **B**

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain  
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;  
15 So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating  
“Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—  
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—  
That it is and nothing more.”

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1. **surcease**: an end.

**ANALYZE VISUALS**

What techniques has the photographer used that make the raven on page 439 seem mysterious?

**A SOUND DEVICES**

Reread lines 1–6. What pattern of **internal rhyme** does Poe establish in the first stanza?

**B MAKE INFERENCES**

Reread lines 9–12. What does this passage imply about Lenore’s connection to the speaker and the reason for her absence? Give details to support your answer.

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,  
20 "Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;  
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,  
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,  
That I scarce was sure I heard you"—here I opened wide the door;—  
Darkness there and nothing more. ©

25 Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,  
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;  
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,  
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore!"  
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word "Lenore!"  
30 Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,  
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.  
"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice;  
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—  
35 Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—  
'Tis the wind and nothing more!"

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,  
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.<sup>2</sup>  
Not the least obeisance<sup>3</sup> made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;  
40 But, with mien<sup>4</sup> of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas<sup>5</sup> just above my chamber door—  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more. ©

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,  
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,  
45 "Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,<sup>6</sup>  
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—  
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian<sup>7</sup> shore!"  
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore." ©

Much I marveled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,  
50 Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;  
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being

2. **days of yore:** days of long ago.

3. **obeisance** (ô-bā'səns): a gesture of respect.

4. **mien** (mēn): appearance.

5. **bust of Pallas:** statue of the head and shoulders of Pallas Athena, Greek goddess of wisdom.

6. **craven:** coward.

7. **Plutonian:** having to do with Pluto, Roman god of the dead and ruler of the underworld.

© **STANZA AND RHYME SCHEME**

Recall that a poem's rhyme scheme is its pattern of **end rhyme**. Describe the rhyme scheme of this poem. How does Poe use **repetition** as part of the rhyme scheme?

© **SOUND DEVICES**

Reread lines 37–38. What example of **onomatopoeia** can you find?

© **SOUND DEVICES**

Identify the **alliteration** in lines 45–46. What words are emphasized by using this technique?

Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—  
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,  
With such name as “Nevermore.”

55 But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only  
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.  
Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—  
Till I scarcely more than muttered “Other friends have flown before—  
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.”  
60 Then the bird said, “Nevermore.” **F**

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,  
“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store  
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster  
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden<sup>8</sup> bore—  
65 Till the dirges<sup>9</sup> of his Hope that melancholy burden bore  
Of ‘Never—nevermore.’”

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,  
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;  
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking  
70 Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—  
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore  
Meant in croaking, “Nevermore.” **G**

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing  
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom’s core;  
75 This and more I sat divining,<sup>10</sup> with my head at ease reclining  
On the cushion’s velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o’er,  
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o’er,  
*She* shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer  
80 Swung by Seraphim<sup>11</sup> whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.  
“Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee  
Respite—respite and nepenthe<sup>12</sup> from thy memories of Lenore;  
Quaff,<sup>13</sup> oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!”  
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

8. **burden**: the chorus or refrain of a song.

9. **dirges**: songs of mourning.

10. **divining**: guessing from incomplete evidence.

11. **censer / Swung by Seraphim** (sēr’ə-fīm): container of sweet burning incense swung by angels of the highest rank.

12. **respite . . . and nepenthe** (nĭ-pĕn’tĕ): temporary relief and a forgetfulness that eases grief.

13. **quaff**: drink deeply.

**F MAKE INFERENCES**

Reread lines 58–59.

What does this

comment suggest

about the speaker’s past

experiences and his

current mood? Explain.

**G SOUND DEVICES**

Identify the sound device

used in lines 71–72. What

qualities of the raven are

emphasized by the use of

this device?

85 “Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—  
Whether Tempter<sup>14</sup> sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—  
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—  
Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?<sup>15</sup>—tell me—tell me, I implore!”  
90 Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!  
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,<sup>16</sup>  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
95 Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.”  
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.” **H**

“Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!” I shrieked, upstarting—  
“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!  
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!  
100 Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!  
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”  
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
105 And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,  
And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

**H MAKE INFERENCES**  
Given the bird’s repeated response, what does the speaker’s persistent questioning of the raven suggest about his state of mind? Explain your answer.

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14. **Tempter**: the devil.

15. **balm** (bām) in **Gilead** (gīl’ē-əd): relief from suffering.

16. **Aidenn** (ād’n): heaven (from the Arabic form of the word *Eden*).

## Comprehension

1. **Recall** Where and when do the events of the poem take place?
2. **Recall** What is the raven's response to all of the speaker's questions?
3. **Clarify** What is the speaker's explanation of the raven's one response?

## Literary Analysis

4. **Draw Conclusions** Review the **inferences** you made as you read. What conclusions did you draw about the speaker and his emotional state?
5. **Examine Tone** For each of the following passages, describe the speaker's tone, or attitude, toward the raven. What explains the speaker's changing responses to his mysterious visitor?
  - the raven's first appearance (lines 43–44)
  - the thoughts the raven inspires (lines 71–74)
  - the purpose the speaker attributes to the raven (lines 81–84)
  - the speaker's command to the raven (lines 97–98)

6. **Compare and Contrast Imagery** Poe uses imagery to create a stark contrast between Lenore and the raven. Using a chart like the one shown, list images used to describe each character. Based on these images, what main feeling or quality is each character used to communicate? Cite evidence.

Lenore	Raven

7. **Evaluate Sound Devices** Reread lines 79–84. Identify the sound devices used in this stanza, and give examples of each technique. Which of these devices do you find most compelling or effective? Explain your answer.
8. **Make Judgments** Consider the speaker's changing responses to the raven and the conclusions you drew about his state of mind. What does the speaker's **conflict** with the raven suggest about the behavior of people who are struggling with **grief**? Support your answer with details.

## Literary Criticism

9. **Author's Style** In an essay about "The Raven," Poe claimed that he started with the word *nevermore* (he liked its vowel sounds), then added the death of a beautiful woman ("the most poetical topic in the world"). Only later did he invent the story and characters that readers have found so moving and memorable. Poe seems to have been more interested in form than content. Which do you find more important in this poem? Cite details in your answer.



### 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), common idioms, and mythological and literary allusions, and explain how they impact meaning in a variety of texts with an emphasis on how they evoke reader's emotions.

## Reading-Writing Connection

### WRITING PROMPT

**WRITE A MONOLOGUE** In a monologue, a character expresses thoughts in an uninterrupted flow, with no other character's words intervening. Monologues in literature often explore a character's feelings. They may be addressed to an absent or abstract listener, or they may be more random, following a person's train of thought.

Write a **one-page prose monologue**, in your own voice or that of a fictional character, that explores an emotion, such as grief, anger, or joy. Use your monologue to reveal details about your speaker's personality and the reasons for his or her emotional response.

### SELF-CHECK

**A successful monologue will . . .**

- reflect the clearly defined voice of the speaker
- effectively convey the speaker's emotional state
- establish a convincing motivation for the speaker's feelings

### GRAMMAR AND STYLE

**CRAFT EFFECTIVE SENTENCES** Poe uses **imperative sentences**—sentences that give orders or make requests—and **dashes** to convey his character's excitable state. The use of dashes and a tone of breathless urgency are distinctive features of Poe's style.

*"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting—*

*"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!" (lines 97–98)*

**PRACTICE** Using the following verse from "The Raven" as a model, compose your own stanza in the style of Poe, incorporating dashes and imperative sentences. Feel free to choose a different subject, but make sure to follow Poe's rhyme scheme and to echo his tone. A sample beginning is provided for you.

#### EXAMPLE

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—

*"You pest, begone!" I cried—near choking. "Take from me your wretched joking!"*

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—

Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,

Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—

On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—

Is there—*is there* balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."



#### SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD Writing Process

**Benchmark LA.1112.3.4.5** Varied sentence structure, including the elimination of dangling or misplaced modifiers, run-on or fused sentences, and unintended sentence fragments.



For prewriting, revision, and editing tools, visit the **Writing Center** at [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com).