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THE POWER OF

SOUND

Edgar Allan Poe is widely recognized as one of the most imaginative and evocative writers in the history of literature. Part of Poe's success is undoubtedly due to how he 'added' sound and sound effects to his writing. Sound can be mysterious—we can't touch or see it, but we can definitely hear and feel it. It can be part of a particular space, but at the same time it can make you feel dislocated. It can bring to mind memories and create unreal images, and often seems to belong somewhere between reality and the imagination. Sound is deeply connected with the most obscure and unexplored parts of the human psyche. Poe was an explorer of the unconscious, who wanted to examine some of humanity's deepest fears and fantasies. And he was fully aware of the pathological dimension of sound.

In his essays, Poe clearly wrote that the goal of his poetry was to create an emotional impact on his readers. The pleasure in poetry, he believed, is related to music, and musical sounds contribute to the readers' pleasure by stimulating their sense of beauty. In his view, poetry should be a combination of sensual sound and sensuous imagery within a poetical structure. Poetry has little to do with inspiration. It is about finding ways of using language. Far from the romantic idea of poetry coming from divine inspiration, the poet is for Poe a word-maker and a craftsman. In order to achieve his goal, he used the evocative power of sound to help him convey emotions and create a precise emotional effect on his readers.



OVER TO YOU

Define the following in pairs, giving examples.

- alliteration
- assonance
- internal rhymes
- onomatopoeia

Most of Poe's poems are as much about sound as they are about meaning. Some of them are characterized by an obsessive, almost manic[•] repetition of sounds, as well as by the use of emphatic rhyme schemes and other metric arrangements, along with internal rhymes, onomatopoeia, alliteration, and assonance. 'The Bells', for example, is a poem about the passages of life from birth to death, in which Poe imitates the sound of bells with words. Each part of the poem has its own distinct sounds, and each stage of life has a different bell sound.

- **craftsman:** someone who makes things
- **dislocated:** (here) lost
- **evocative:** that makes one think of a feeling or image
- **impact:** effect
- **manic:** (here) uncontrolled and mad
- **obscure:** dark and not understood
- **pathological:** unreasonable and impossible to control
- **psyche:** mind, heart and soul
- **unconscious:** hidden and uncontrolled part of the mind

THE FALL OF THE



LADY MADELINE & RODERICK USHER



THE NARRATOR

HOUSE

OF USHER




THE DOCTOR

BEFORE READING


- 1  Look at these scenes from *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Discuss with a partner.



- Write at least 5 words or phrases to describe each scene.
- What is the atmosphere like in each one?
- What is happening in each scene?

-  2 Listen to the opening of the story. Which of the sentences below best describes how the narrator feels? Tick (✓).

- The narrator is looking forward to going to the House of Usher.
- The narrator is indifferent to going to the House of Usher.
- The narrator feels uneasy and unhappy about going to the House of Usher.

- 3  You may find this story and the others in this book very frightening. Or perhaps nothing frightens you! Work with a partner. Describe your scariest experience, or something you heard or saw that made you feel afraid.



4 Here are some words that appear in the story. Match them with the pictures.

a armour

b fungi

c lute

d shield

e tapestry

f carving

g vault

h web




5 Use the words above to complete these sentences.

- a Spirits danced happily around a king to the music of a
- b A of shining brass hung on the wall.
- c There were on the ceilings and dark on the walls.
- d Minute were hanging in a fine tangled from the edges of the roof.
- e Suits of stood in the corridors of the house and rattled as I walked past.
- f The was small and damp, and did not admit any light.

6 In the story, you will read about someone who goes to visit an old friend. Imagine that you go to visit a friend who you haven't seen for a long time. Your friend has changed. Write a short paragraph about the changes.



 For a whole dull•, dark, and soundless autumn day, when the clouds were low in the sky, I had been riding alone through the dreary• countryside. Eventually, as evening fell, I found myself within view of the melancholy House of Usher. When I saw the building, I felt a sense of gloom•.

PLACES

Have you ever visited a place and suddenly felt happy or sad? Describe how you felt. Why did this place make you feel this way? Was it something to do with the weather, the appearance of the place, or the people who were there?

I looked at the scene before me—at the house and the simple landscape, at the bleak• walls, at the vacant eye-like windows, at the rough grass, and at a few white trunks of decayed• trees—with a sense of depression, like an opium• addict awakening from his dream. I felt a sense of iciness and my heart felt cold and heavy. What was it that made me so nervous when I thought about the House of Usher? It was a mystery, and I could not fight against the dark thoughts that filled me.

- **bleak**: empty, cold and depressing
- **decayed**: rotten; destroyed through age
- **dreary**: boring and dark; without life
- **dull**: not bright
- **gloom**: darkness and depression
- **opium**: type of drug

I was forced to come to the unsatisfactory conclusion that some things are beyond our understanding. If the scene in front of me had been arranged in any different way, it possibly would not have left me with such a sad impression. With this in mind, I rode my horse to the edge of a black lake that was close to the house and, trembling more than before, I looked down on the reflection of the grey grass, the ghastly• tree trunks, and the empty, eye-like windows in the water.

Nevertheless, I was proposing to• stay a few weeks in this gloomy house. Its owner, Roderick Usher, had been one of my childhood companions•, but it had been many years since our last meeting. A letter from him had reached me, and it gave evidence that he was very disturbed•. The writer spoke of physical illness, and of a disorder of the mind. He said I was his best and only friend, and he felt that the cheerfulness of my company would lessen• his malady•. I did not hesitate when I read this. I obeyed his request immediately.

RODERICK USHER

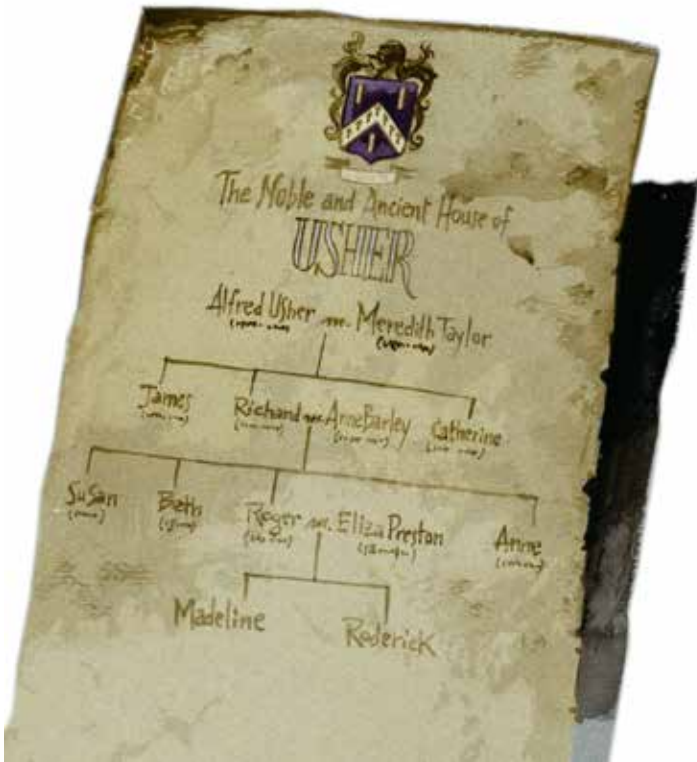
How does the narrator know Roderick Usher?

Why does Usher write to the narrator?

What does Usher ask the narrator to do?

- **companions:** friends
- **disturbed:** unhappy and confused
- **ghastly:** horrible and frightening
- **lessen:** make less
- **malady:** illness
- **proposing to:** thinking of

Although, as boys, we had been quite close, I knew very little about my friend. He had always been very reserved•. I was aware•, however, that his family had displayed its talent over the years in many works of art. They had also performed repeated acts of charity•, as well as showing passionate devotion to music. I learned, too, that for the most part, the Usher family had never produced• any continuing branch•. And that the entire family was in a direct line of descent•. Indeed, this had always been the case with very little variation.



- **branch:** descendants; sons, daughters, etc.
- **charity:** (here) kindness
- **direct line of descent:** there was always just one child who had children of their own
- **I was aware:** I knew
- **produced:** (here) had children
- **reserved:** quiet; shy; private

I began to think about how the character of the house perfectly matched the character of the people who lived in it. And I speculated on the possible influence that, over the centuries, the one might have exercised on the other. Indeed, it was this lack of descendants, and the continual passing down from father to son of the family home, along with the family name, which had eventually caused both to be identified with the title of the estate: the 'House of Usher'. In the minds of the peasantry who used it, this title seems to include both the family and the family mansion.

THE HOUSE OF USHER

What do we know about the Usher family?

Tick (✓) the correct answers.

- Roderick has got a large extended family.
- Roderick's family are interested in the arts.
- Roderick's family inherited the house recently.
- The Usher family has always been small.

Now think of your own family.

How far can you trace your family tree?

- **estate:** a family's house and land
- **exercised:** (here) had
- **lack:** absence
- **mansion:** large noble house

- **passing down:** giving from one generation to the next
- **peasantry:** country people
- **perfectly matched:** was exactly like
- **speculated:** thought; guessed

When I looked up again at the house itself, from its image in the water, a strange thought grew in my mind. It was a thought so ridiculous• that I only say it to show the strength of the feelings that oppressed me. I had concentrated so much on my imagination that I really believed there was an atmosphere around the whole house and surrounding area that had no connection with the air of heaven. This atmosphere seemed to come from the decayed trees, the grey wall, and the silent lake, like a pestilent• and mysterious vapour•.

Shaking off from my spirit what felt like a dream, I looked at the building in more detail. Its main feature seemed to be its excessive age. It was discoloured, and tiny fungi covered the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled• web from the edges of the roof. There appeared to be some inconsistency• between the apparently perfect state of the bricks, and the crumbling• condition of the individual stones. Apart from this sign of extensive decay, the construction gave little sign of instability. Perhaps a careful observer might have discovered a barely perceptible• crack• extending from the roof of the building in front, and that zigzagged down the wall, until it became lost in the waters of the lake.

Noticing these things, I rode over a short bridge to the house. A servant took my horse, and I entered the Gothic archway of the hall. A valet• led me, in silence, through many dark, winding• corridors to his master's room. Much of what I saw on the way contributed to increase the feelings of which I have already spoken. The objects around me, the carvings on the ceilings, the dark tapestries on the walls, the black floors, and the suits of armour, which rattled as I walked, were all things which I remembered from my childhood.

- **barely perceptible:** that was difficult to see
- **crack:** break in a wall
- **crumbling:** breaking into small parts
- **inconsistency:** difference
- **pestilent:** that causes disease
- **ridiculous:** silly; absurd
- **tangled:** confused mass; mixed
- **valet:** male servant of a man
- **vapour:** air with tiny drops of liquid
- **winding:** with many turns; not straight



Still, I was surprised at the unfamiliar thoughts that these ordinary images were creating in me. On one of the staircases, I met the physician• of the family. I thought he had a puzzled• expression on his face. He seemed agitated and walked past me. The valet opened a door and accompanied me in to the presence of his master.

The room in which I found myself was very large and high. The windows were long and narrow, and at a vast distance from the black wooden floor, making them inaccessible• from inside the room. Feeble• rays of light filtered through the window panes•, so that it was possible to see the more prominent objects; however, it was difficult to see the remoter• corners of the room, or the ceiling. Dark tapestries hung on the walls. The furniture was old and tattered•. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered• about. I felt that I was breathing an atmosphere of sadness. An air of gloom pervaded• everything.

WARNING SIGNS

Think about what the narrator has seen and thought so far. What signs are there to warn us that something is wrong in the House of Usher?

- **feeble:** not strong; weak
- **inaccessible:** that cannot be reached
- **panes:** sheets of glass
- **pervaded:** filled
- **physician:** doctor
- **puzzled:** confused
- **remoter:** more distant
- **scattered:** placed in an untidy way
- **tattered:** torn; in rags

AFTER READING VOCABULARY

1 Use five of the words in the box to complete the sentences.

disease panes lapse stained
sable corpse dagger pores


- a Pestilence is a terrible, infectious
- b The rooms had tall, narrow Gothic windows of glass.
- c In the seventh room, the window were scarlet, a deep blood colour.
- d After a of sixty minutes, the clock chimed once more.
- e The prince rapidly approached the figure with a in his hand.

2  In pairs, write three sentences with the words left out in Exercise 1.

3 **P** Complete the sentences with the word that best fits each gap. Use only ONE word.

- a The disease caused sharp pains, sudden dizziness, and heavy bleeding from the pores of the, and then
- b By taking these precautions, the courtiers themselves against the possibility of infection. The external world could take of itself.
- c In palaces like these, the rooms were usually in a long straight line. Here, the case was very, as was typical of the prince's love of bizarre things.
- d The effect of the fire produced such a wild look on the of those who entered, that very few of the company were courageous enough to set inside the room.
- e When the minute had circled the clock's face, the hour struck, and a very strange sound came from the clock.
- f Everybody stopped, and the enjoyment of the company was interrupted.

P B1 Preliminary English Test Speaking Part 2

1  In pairs, look at two pictures from *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

Student A: look at the picture on page 25.

What relevance does it have to the story?

What can you see in the picture? Tell Student B.

Student B: look at the picture on page 49.

What relevance does it have to the story?

What can you see in the picture? Tell Student A.

P B1 Preliminary English Test Reading Part 3

2 Read the questions about *The Oval Portrait* and choose the correct answer (A, B, C or D).

1 Who noticed that the painter's wife was growing weaker and weaker?

A nobody

B everybody but the painter

C her family

D his family

2 Why didn't the girl complain?

A She was happy so she said nothing.

B She enjoyed being painted.

C Her husband never listened to her complaints.

D She loved her husband, and she knew he really enjoyed painting.

3 What happened to the girl's cheeks as the artist painted her?

A They grew redder and healthier.

B They disappeared.

C They grew paler and lost their colour.

D They grew brighter, and she looked happier.

4 What did the painter realize in the end?

A The painting was terrible.

B The painting was in fact real. It had sucked the life out of his wife.

C The painting didn't look like his wife.

D The painting wasn't as beautiful as his wife.