

## PREPARING to Read

# The Raven

Poetry by EDGAR ALLAN POE

### Connect to Your Life

**The Pain of Loss** The speaker of “The Raven,” one of the most famous poems in American literature, is a man grieving over the death of his beloved, Lenore. To understand the speaker’s feelings, think about a time when you or someone you know lost a loved one—a person or a pet—through death or separation. Write a brief account of how you or the other person handled the loss.

### Build Background

**The Raven’s Reputation** The raven that visits the poem’s speaker lands on a bust of the ancient Greek goddess of wisdom, Athena. To the ancient Greeks, the raven was a bird of prophecy. In Western culture, ravens have long been associated with mystery, evil omens, and death. When writing his poem about loss, Poe first considered using an owl or a parrot as his mysterious visitor, but because of its cultural associations, the raven became his choice.

#### WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

beguiling	implore
decorum	ominous
dirge	placid
discourse	respite
divining	tempest

### Focus Your Reading

**LITERARY ANALYSIS SOUND DEVICES** One distinctive feature of “The Raven” is Poe’s handling of **rhyme**, the repetition of similar sounds. Poe used rhymes in the following ways to produce musical effects in the poem:

- **End rhyme:** similar or identical sounds at the ends of lines
- **Internal rhyme:** rhymes within a line
- **Rhyme scheme:** the basic pattern of the end rhymes

Read “The Raven” aloud to better appreciate Poe’s use of rhyme and other sound devices. As you read, notice how Poe maintains the rhyme scheme.

**ACTIVE READING DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** Readers **draw conclusions** by using their own knowledge and experiences to make logical guesses about characters and events in what they read. As you read “The Raven,” try to draw conclusions about the speaker. Consider the following:

- the events he describes
- his physical condition when the events take place
- his intense sorrow about his loss

In your **READER’S NOTEBOOK**, list your conclusions about the speaker, and explain how you arrived at them.

# 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.”

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.

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.”

1. surcease: an end.

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 theroat 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."

2. saintly days of yore: sacred days of the past.

3. obeisance (ō-bā'səns): a polite gesture of respect, such as a bow.

4. mien (mēn): a way of carrying oneself; appearance.

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

6. craven: cowardly person.

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

WORDS **implore** (īm-plôr') *v.* to beg, earnestly ask for  
TO **beguiling** (bĭ-gī'lĭng) *adj.* charming or delighting **beguile** *v.*  
KNOW **decorum** (dĭ-kôr'əm) *n.* proper and dignified behavior

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  
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.”

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 bore—  
65 Till the dirges 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.”

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, 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!

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**discourse** (dĭ-skōrs') *v.* to speak  
**placid** (plās'ĭd) *adj.* undisturbed; calm or quiet  
**dirge** (dĭrj) *n.* a slow, mournful piece of music; a funeral hymn  
**ominous** (ōm'ə-nēs) *adj.* threatening; menacing  
**divining** (dĭ-vī'nĭŋ) *adj.* finding out through intuition; guessing from incomplete evidence **divine** *v.*

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer<sup>8</sup>  
 80 Swung by Seraphim<sup>9</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>10</sup> from thy memories of Lenore;  
 Quaff,<sup>11</sup> oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"  
 Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

85 "Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—  
 Whether Tempter<sup>12</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>13</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>14</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."

"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<sup>15</sup> 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!

8. censer: a container in which incense is burned, especially during religious services.

9. Seraphim (sēr'ə-fīm): angels of the highest rank.

10. nepenthe (nĭ-pĕn'thē): a drug that eases grief or sorrow by causing forgetfulness.

11. quaff: drink deeply.

12. Tempter: the Devil.

13. balm (bām) in Gilead (gĭl'ē-əd): relief from suffering. The phrase comes from the Bible (Jeremiah 8:22) and refers to a soothing ointment from Gilead, a region of Palestine.

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

15. pallid: pale.

## Connect to the Literature

1. **What Do You Think?**  
What three words would you use to describe the raven?

### Comprehension Check

- When do the events in the poem take place?
- Where does the speaker look to find the source of the sound he hears?
- What is the raven's response to all the speaker's questions?

## Think Critically

2. **ACTIVE READING** **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** Refer to the **conclusions** about the **speaker** that you recorded in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK**. What conclusions did you draw about his mental state?

3. What meaning or meanings do you think the word *nevermore* has in the poem? What effect does the **repetition** of the word have on you?

4. How do you explain the raven and its visit?



- why the bird comes to the speaker
- whether the bird is real or an illusion

## Extend Interpretations

5. **Critic's Corner** The poet James Russell Lowell wrote this couplet: "There comes Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge, / Three-fifths of him genius and two-fifths sheer fudge." (Barnaby Rudge is a character in a Charles Dickens novel who walks about with a pet raven on his back.) Do you agree with Lowell's view of Poe? Explain your opinion, referring to what you know about Poe's life and writings.
6. **Connect to Life** Recall your thoughts about the way in which you or someone you know handled a loss. What useful advice do you think you could give the speaker of "The Raven"?

Stanza	Rhyme Scheme
Stanza 1	
Stanza 2	

## Literary Analysis

**SOUND DEVICES** Much of the musical quality of "The Raven" is produced by Poe's use of **rhyme**, the repetition of similar or identical sounds, to drive the poem's rhythm forward. Rhyme is employed by poets in various ways.

- **End rhyme** is the use of words with similar or identical sounds at the ends of lines:

... *tapping at my chamber door—  
Only this and nothing more.*

- **Internal rhyme** is the use of rhyming words within a line:

*Back into the chamber turning, all  
my soul within me burning*

- A **rhyme scheme** (pattern of end rhymes in a stanza or poem) can be identified by assigning a letter, starting with *a*, to each line, with lines that rhyme being given the same letter. Here is an example from Poe's poem "Annabel Lee":

*It was many and many a year ago, a*  
*In a kingdom by the sea. b*  
*That a maiden there lived whom*  
*you may know a*  
*By the name of Annabel Lee:— b*

**Cooperative Learning Activity** Get together with a group of classmates, and have each member of the group record the rhyme scheme, along with any uses of internal rhyme, in a different stanza of "The Raven." Gather your information in a simple chart like the one shown here, and then compare findings. Does the rhyme scheme change from stanza to stanza, or does it stay the same? How does Poe's use of rhyme scheme affect the overall atmosphere of the poem?


# Choices & CHALLENGES

## Writing Options

**1. Prose Description** Write a prose description of the setting of "The Raven." Use words and phrases that evoke the same overall atmosphere as the poem itself.

**2. Speaker's Diary Entry** Writing as the speaker, compose a diary entry for a day one week after the events described in the poem. What does the speaker think and feel now? What has happened to the raven?

**3. Poetic Parody** A parody is an imitation (usually intended to be humorous) of a literary or artistic work. Write one or two stanzas of a parody of "The Raven." You might use another bird or animal in place of the raven, change the reason for the speaker's sorrow,

or invent a new message for the intruder to utter. Whatever you change, try to follow Poe's meter and rhyme schemes so that your parody will be recognizable. Place the parody in your Working Portfolio. 

## Activities & Explorations

**1. Dramatic Reading** With other members of your class, take turns performing dramatic readings of the poem. You might make video or audio recordings of the readings. ~ PERFORMING

**2. Image of the Study** Make an illustration of the speaker's study, including him and the raven. Try to capture the mood of Poe's

poem through your use of details and color. ~ ART

## Inquiry & Research

**Psychological View** Modern psychology—the systematic study of human behavior—did not develop until several decades after Poe's death. In the 20th century, however, it became common for literary critics to discuss characters' actions in psychological terms. Find out some basic information about psychology—and in particular about psychotic disorders and psychotherapy. Then discuss the speaker of "The Raven" in terms of his possible psychological condition.

## Vocabulary in Action

**EXERCISE A: MEANING CLUES** Read each magazine article title below and write the vocabulary word you would expect to find in the article.

1. "Wild Weather: Protecting Yourself from the Elements"
2. "How to Ask for Forgiveness . . . and Get It"
3. "Vacation Spots for When You Really Need a Break"
4. "Psychics and Fortunetellers: Help or Hype?"
5. "Modern Manners for Modern Times"
6. "Flee or Fight? What to Do When You're in Danger"
7. "Avoiding the Wrong Music for Your Wedding"
8. "Tossing and Turning? You Too Can Sleep Like a Rock"
9. "How to Hold Up Your End of the Conversation"
10. "Putting That Certain Someone Under Your Spell"

**EXERCISE B** With a partner, take turns acting out the meanings of the words *implore*, *decorum*, *placid*, *ominous*, *divine*, and *respite*. (In some cases, you may be able to communicate the meaning with a single gesture.)

WORDS	beguiling	discourse	ominous	respite
TO	decorum	divining	placid	tempest
KNOW	dirge	implore		

### Building Vocabulary

For an in-depth lesson on word connotation and denotation, see page 908.