

# American Horror

## Three Terrifying Tales

Three of Poe's terrifying tales of madness are presented here. In **"The Black Cat"** the crazy narrator's horrible crime is exposed to the police by his cat. The wild artist in **"The Oval Portrait"** takes the life out of his wife to be able to put it on canvas, and in **"The Tell-Tale Heart"** a dead man's beating heart reveals the murderer to the police.

- Wide range of activities practicing the four skills
- FCE-style activities
- Trinity-style activities (Grade 7)
- Dossiers: *A Short History of the "Whodunit"* and *Two Kings of Hollywood Horror*
- Internet project
- Full recording of the text
- Exit test with answer key



Step One	■ CEFR A2	Exam Level KET
Step Two	■ CEFR B1.1	Exam Preparation PET
Step Three	■ CEFR B1.2	Exam Level PET
Step Four	■ CEFR B2.1	Exam Preparation FCE
Step Five	■ CEFR B2.2	Exam Level FCE
Step Six	■ CEFR C1	Exam Preparation CAE

Edgar Allan Poe  
**AMERICAN HORROR**  
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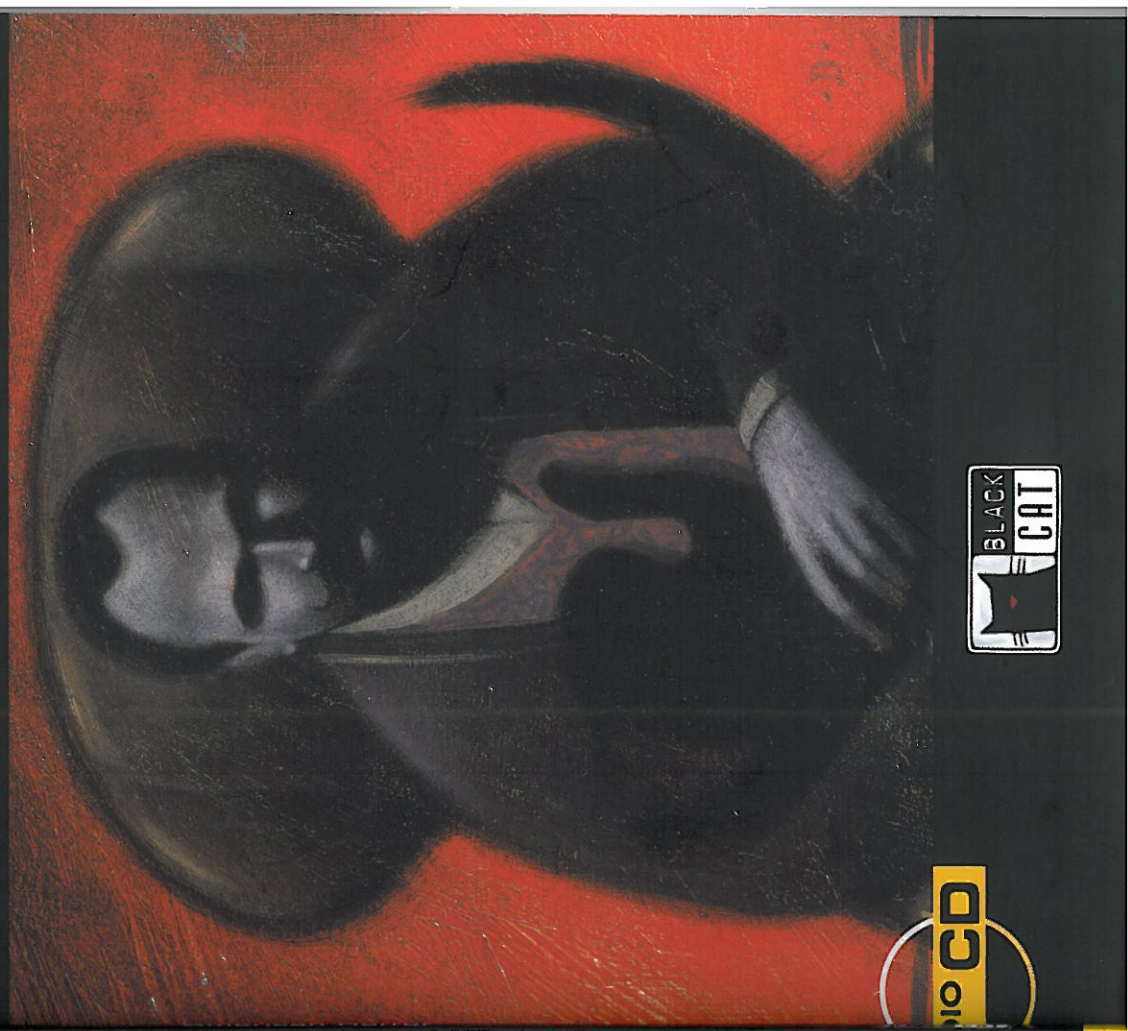


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# American Horror

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Edgar Allan Poe

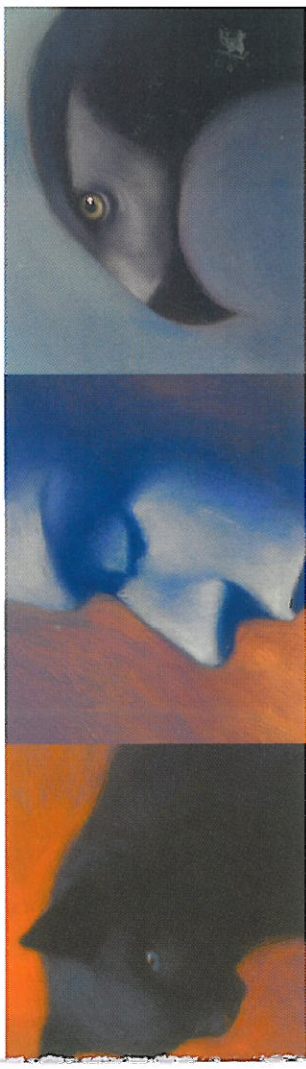


Edgar Allan Poe

# AMERICAN HORROR

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## THREE TERRIFYING TALES



Text adaptation, notes and activities  
by **Kenneth Brodey**

Editors: Rebecca Raynes, Frances Evans  
Design and art direction: Nadia Maestri  
Computer graphics: Simona Corniola  
Illustrations: Gianni De Conno  
Picture Research: Laura Lagomarsino

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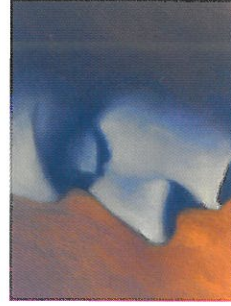


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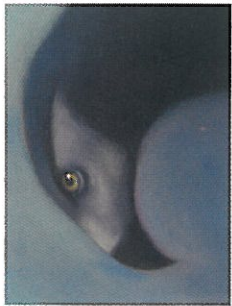
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First Certificate in English Examination-style exercises



Trinity-style exercises (Grade 7)

This story is recorded in full.

These symbols indicate the beginning and end of the extracts linked to the listening activities.



*Edgar Allan Poe* (1845) selfportrait.  
Bloomington Indiana University, Lily Library.

## Edgar's Life

“From childhood’s hour I have not been  
As others were — I have not seen  
As others saw

And all I loved, I loved alone”  
From Edgar’s poem “Alone”

Edgar Allan Poe is famous for his tales of horror. He is also considered the inventor of the modern detective story, the modern short story itself and modernist poetry. In addition he was one of the earliest creators of science fiction. His stories were also the basis for that great popular art form, the horror film. More books have been written about Edgar Allan Poe than any other American author. In part, this is because of his great artistic influence, but also because his life was as mysterious and tragic as his stories and poems.

He was born on January 19, 1809 in Boston. His parents were both actors. His mother, who went to the United States in 1796 from England, was a very good actress. Magazines and newspapers wrote good things about her. At the age of 15 she already knew more than 70 different theatrical roles. Edgar's father, on the other hand, was a very bad actor and could not make enough money to support his family. In fact, when Edgar was only two years old his father left the family. Nobody knows where he went.

This is the beginning of Edgar's troubles.<sup>1</sup> Soon after his father left, his mother became very ill with tuberculosis. Nobody helped her. She was only twenty-four years old and had three children. She died on December 8, 1811. Edgar was only two years old.

Fortunately, Mrs Frances Allan, the wife of John Allan, a businessman from Richmond, Virginia, heard about the Poe children. As an act of charity she decided to bring Edgar to live in her house. She was impressed with his good looks.<sup>2</sup> Mrs Allan's husband agreed to have Edgar live in their house, but he refused to officially adopt him. Mr Allan did not want his heir<sup>3</sup> to be the son

1. **troubles** [trʌblz] : problems, difficulties.
2. **good looks** : if you have good looks it means you are beautiful/handsome.
3. **heir** [eɪ(r)] : your heir is the person who you decide will receive your property when you die.

of actors. Acting at this time was considered an immoral profession. Edgar suffered because of this decision, and his relationship with Mr Allan was never good. In 1815 the Allans, together with Edgar, went to live in England for five years. When they returned to the United States in 1820 Edgar went to private schools in Richmond. In 1826 he went to the University of Virginia. He was a very good student, but Mr Allan did not send him enough money to live. In order to make money for school, Edgar gambled.<sup>1</sup> But he was not a good gambler and lost money. John Allan still refused to help him. Edgar had to get a job as a clerk.

In 1827 he published his first book of poems. In this same year he joined the United States Army. In 1829 he went to West Point, the American military academy. In this period, after the death of his wife, John Allan ended forever his relationship with Edgar.

In 1832 Edgar went to Baltimore to live with his aunt and his 11-year-old cousin, Virginia Clemm. In 1833 Edgar won a literary contest<sup>2</sup> for his short story



*Virginia Clemm Poe (1843)*  
by Edgar Allan Poe.  
Bloomington Indiana University, Lily Library.

1. **gambled** : played games (card games, roulette, etc.) for money.
2. **contest** : competition.

“MS. Found in a Bottle”. This is the beginning of Edgar’s professional career as a writer.


From 1835 to 1837 he worked as the editor of the literary magazine *Southern Literary Messenger*. He did an extremely good job: sales increased from 500 to 3,500 copies. As editor he explored new areas. He wrote reviews <sup>1</sup> for Latin grammars, dictionaries, other magazines, novels and poetry. He was a fair <sup>2</sup> but very severe critic. He did not care <sup>3</sup> if an author was famous or not. He wrote what he thought.

In 1836, while Edgar was working for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, he married his cousin Virginia Clemm. Like Edgar’s mother, she had tuberculosis, and for the next ten years until her death she was constantly ill.

Even with Edgar’s success as an editor he did not make enough money to support his family. He therefore moved to New York and then to Philadelphia in 1838 and then back to New York in 1844, always looking for better jobs.

In 1840 he published his greatest tales in a collection called *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. In 1843 he wrote “The Gold Bug”, a kind of treasure hunt story with hidden clues, <sup>4</sup> which sold 300,000 copies. This story brought Poe fame, but not financial security. In fact he often worked 15 hours a day, and still he did not have enough money to feed <sup>5</sup> his family.

In 1845 Edgar’s most famous poem, “The Raven”, <sup>6</sup> was published.

1. **reviews** [rɪˈvjuːz]: articles that evaluate the quality of something.
2. **fair**: just, honest.
3. **he did not care**: it was not important to him.
4. **clues**: indications that help to solve a mystery or puzzle.
5. **feed**: provide food for (used for people or animals).
6. **Raven**: 

He was finally successful. But in 1847 his wife died. This “intolerable sorrow” <sup>1</sup> caused Edgar to drink, and, it seems, he had a very low tolerance for alcohol. He returned to Richmond in 1849.

Edgar’s sadness for the death of his wife and his drinking made him ill. On October 3, 1849 Edgar was found unconscious in front of a voting station in Baltimore. He was taken to hospital, where he died four days later.

Edgar’s misfortune did not end with his death. The man who controlled his literary works, Rufus Griswold, was very jealous of Edgar’s genius. He wrote the official obituary <sup>2</sup> of Edgar in which he spoke very badly of Edgar. Because of this obituary Edgar’s reputation was destroyed for many years. In addition, shortly before his death Edgar had revised all his works, but Griswold only published some of them, and often without Edgar’s corrections.

Fortunately, though, the great French poet Charles Baudelaire spent 14 years translating Edgar’s stories, which then became extremely important for French literature. Then when French literature became important for English literature, Edgar was finally considered as an important writer in England and America.



Rufus Griswold.

1. **sorrow**: sadness.
2. **obituary**: article in a newspaper reporting the death of a person and also telling about that person’s life.

## Edgar's Horror

Edgar's horror stories, or "arabesques" as he called them, are particular. They are often full of precise, physical details and reasoning. He analyzes the mentality of madmen with the care of a psychologist or of a detective. In "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" the narrators of these stories analyze their own madness carefully and calmly. But still they can do nothing about it. They remain mad. They commit horrible crimes. This, perhaps, is the most frightening thing about these stories. Also, as Edgar wrote many times, his stories are not about the horrors that exist in the outside world, but the horrors that exist in our own minds. Another reason to be frightened!



Bela Lugosi in a scene of the 1934 film version of *The Black Cat*.

## Edgar's Detective Stories

"Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) is considered the first detective story. Before this, there had been stories about murders, but before Poe the act of murder itself was the most important part of the story; after Poe, the most important part of the story was the collection of facts and the reasoning about these facts needed to solve the mystery.



A scene from the 1932 film version of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, starring Bela Lugosi.

## Go back to the text

In addition, and just as important for the history of literature, Edgar created the first great character of detective stories, Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin. Dupin is the ancestor of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason (see pages 68-72). Dupin is also another one of Edgar's mad characters, but a "harmless<sup>1</sup> madman", who reads during the day and goes out only at night; and who, with imagination and reason, is able to solve the crimes committed by others.

## Some of Edgar's Most Famous Stories

*The Tales of Ratiocination (detective stories)*

- "The Gold Bug" (1843)
- "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841)
- "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842-1843)
- "The Purloined Letter" (1844)

*Tales of the Grotesque*

- "Fall of the House of Usher" (1839)
- "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842)
- "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846)

1. harmless : a harmless person, animal, etc., will not hurt (harm) you.

**1** Here is a summary of what you have just read. Circle the correct answers.

Edgar was born in Boston on January 19, <sup>a</sup> (1709 / 1809 / 1909). Both his parents were <sup>b</sup> (bankers / businessmen / actors). His father abandoned the family when Edgar was two years old, and his mother died soon after.

After this Edgar went to live with the Allans. But Mr Allan never officially <sup>c</sup> (liked / admired / adopted) Edgar.

In 1815 the Allans, together with Edgar, went to live in <sup>d</sup> (France / Germany / England) for five years. In 1820 they returned to the United States. In 1826 Edgar attended the University of <sup>e</sup> (Pennsylvania / Massachusetts / Virginia). He was a good student but Mr Allan did not send him enough money, so Edgar had to <sup>f</sup> (rob banks / steal / gamble) to make money. Finally, in 1829, Mr Allan ended his relationship with Edgar.

In 1833 Edgar won a <sup>g</sup> (beauty / literary / boxing) contest. Three years later he was working as <sup>h</sup> (editor / writer / composer) for a literary magazine. He was very successful, but he still did not make enough money.

In 1836 he married his <sup>i</sup> (sister / cousin / friend) Virginia Clemm who was very ill. She died ten years later.

Edgar continued to be successful as an editor and to write many great stories and poems, but his financial problems continued until his death in <sup>j</sup> (1949 / 1849 / 1749).

Edgar became very famous and important in France because the poet <sup>k</sup> (Charles Baudelaire / Victor Hugo / Charles Rimbaud) translated all his great stories. Edgar is also famous for having invented the first <sup>l</sup> (love / detective / horror) stories. Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin, the hero of these stories, is the literary ancestor of <sup>m</sup> (Rambo / Sherlock Holmes / David Copperfield).



## Horror sounds: an audio glossary



**2** Read the definitions below. Then listen to the recording and match the definitions with the sounds.

- to whisper** : to talk softly so that only the person you are talking to can hear you.
- to creak** : the sharp sound a door with unoiled hinges makes when you open it.
- to cry out** : to say something loudly, or make a loud sharp sound, because you are in pain or frightened.
- to cry** : to produce tears (drops of water from your eyes) because you are sad or afraid.
- to groan** : to make a low sound because you are in pain or afraid.
- to scream** : to make a very loud sharp (acute) sound because you are in pain or frightened; N.B.: to scream is much louder than to cry out.
- to shout** : to speak very loudly.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7

Now practice the sounds with your partner.

## A Poe picture gallery

**3** Read the summaries of four famous stories by Edgar Allan Poe, and decide which answer, A, B, C or D, best fits each space. There is an example at the beginning.

Then match the summaries with the titles given below, and write the correct title under the right pictures on the following pages.

The Masque of the Red Death

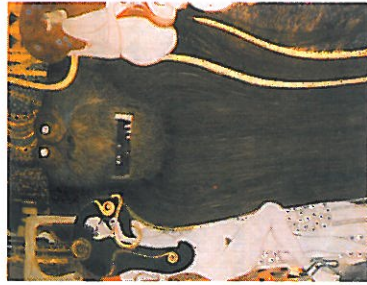
The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall

The Pit and the Pendulum

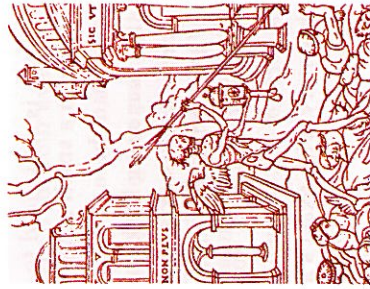
Murders in the Rue Morgue

- A man is sentenced to death (0) ..... slow torture. He is tied down in a small room where there is a (1) ..... deep hole and overhead there is a (2) ..... of knife attached (3) ..... a rope that is moving back and forth like the pendulum of a clock: Each time it goes back and forth it comes closer to the man (4) ..... it is almost touching him. The terror, of course, is extreme!
- A young man from Rotterdam has (5) ..... debts. He escapes in a horse of air. But where? To the moon of course! He (6) ..... his story with exact scientific details, which in part inspired the future father of science fiction, Jules Verne. (*Journey to the Center of the Earth, Around the World in Eighty Days*).
- This story, (7) ..... takes place in Paris, is often (8) ..... the first detective story, and its hero, Monsieur C. August Dupin, the first literary detective. There are very strange murders in this story. The victims are killed by someone with superhuman strength. Different people hear the murderer talking in a "foreign" language. Whodunit?
- This is the story of a prince who tries to escape death. The prince's kingdom is being destroyed by the plague, that terrible disease which periodically decimated Europe (9) ..... the Middle Ages. The symbol and sign of the Plague is the red of blood, and no one can escape it, but the prince tries. He takes all his ladies and knights into his castle where he has luxurious parties, (10) ..... everyone outside is dying. Will death be an unexpected and unwanted guest at the prince's party?

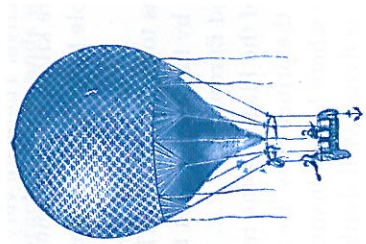
0. A by D from  
 1. A much C so  
 2. A brand C species  
 3. A from C by  
 4. A since C until  
 5. A many C plenty  
 6. A says C talks  
 7. A which C that  
 8. A thought B considered  
 9. A during B through  
 10. A when B until



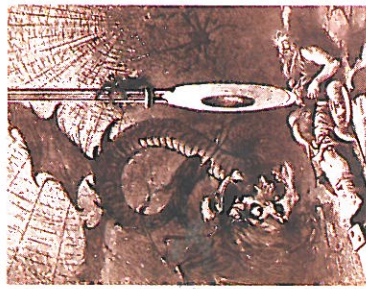
1



2



3



4

# THE BLACK CAT

