

Name:

Date:

Pre-Reading Activity

What does it mean to be superstitious? Are you superstitious?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Directions: Read the following superstitions. Check “true” or “false” to mark whether you believe in that superstition or not; you may mark “never heard of it” if you’re unsure.

Superstitions	TRUE	FALSE	Never Heard of It
If you find a penny heads ups, you should pick it up for good luck.			
Make a wish when you blow out your birthday candles. If you keep it a secret, your wish will come true.			
If you're hoping for a good outcome, you should cross your fingers.			
Full moons bring chaos and unpredictable behavior.			
Beware of any black cats crossing your path. Black cats are witches reincarnated.			
If it's your first time playing a game, you might experience beginner's luck.			
If your necklace clasp falls to the front of your neck, it means someone is thinking about you.			
If you peel an entire apple in one motion and throw the peel over your shoulder, it will land in the shape of the first initial of the person you will marry.			
Knock on wood to ward off bad luck, especially after someone has just said something ominous.			
Don't walk under a ladder unless you want bad luck.			

Itchy palms or hands means you'll come into some money soon.			
Carry around a rabbit's foot with you to bring about good luck.			
If you break a mirror, you will surrender yourself to seven years of bad luck.			
When you're out to dinner, you should toss a sprinkle of salt over your shoulder to ward off evil spirits, especially the devil.			
If a bird poops on your head, you will have good fortune.			
If you sweep a broom over your feet, you will end up single forever.			
Touch the roof of your car if you drive through a yellow light. Yellow means to drive with caution and if you make it through, you should show your gratitude... kiss your fingers before you tap the roof for extra thanks.			
Never open an umbrella inside unless you want bad luck.			
Hold your breath when you pass a cemetery so no souls can enter your body!			
If a ladybug lands on you, you will have good luck.			
If you see an owl, it's a bad omen.			
Fear the number 13! The number is innately unlucky and will bring misfortune. Did you know it's so feared that many apartment buildings and hotels skip the number 13 when labeling floors? Even some airlines skip having a 13th row.			
A horseshoe is one of the luckiest of all symbols, especially if you find one with the open end pointing toward you.			

Date:

Pick any 10 vocabulary words from the following list and complete the chart. An example has been done for you.

docility
tinctured
equivocal
evinced
expedient

[illegible]

Name:

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"The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe
Short Story Reading Questions

1. What does the narrator mean when he says he will die tomorrow?

2. How does the narrator describe himself?

3. What type of pets did the narrator and his wife own?

4. Who is Pluto? What is Pluto like?

5. Why did the narrator's temperament start to change? How does it change?

6. Why does Pluto bite the narrator? How does the narrator react?

7. What is the spirit of perverseness? What does it inspire the narrator to do?

8. What happened the night that Pluto died?

9. What does the narrator see on the wall of his home that was destroyed?

10. Why does the narrator bring home another black cat?

11. Why does the narrator raise an axe to the new cat?

12. How does the narrator's wife die?

13. How does the narrator dispose of the body?

14. How does the narrator sleep after his wife's death?

15. What happens four days after the murder?

16. How does the narrator's pride affect his behavior?

17. How does the narrator get caught?

18. What foreshadowing does Poe use in this story?

19. What is significant about the name Pluto?

20. Was the narrator's murderous ways inevitable? To go from killing animals to killing people?

21. What is ironic about the narrator fantasizing and actually killing his animals?

22. What is ironic about the narrator's home?

23. Who or what do you think is to blame for the narrator's behavior?

24. Does the alcohol release the narrator's inner demons, or is it merely an excuse for his horrendous acts of violence?

25. In what ways is the narrator reliable and in what ways is he unreliable?

"The Black Cat" Short Story Reading Questions Answer Key

1. What does the narrator mean when he says he will die tomorrow?

He is in prison and will be executed tomorrow for whatever crime he has committed.

2. How does the narrator describe himself?

He is not mad, meaning he is not crazy. He says he was docile: submissive, flexible, and had a love for animals.

3. What type of pets did the narrator and his wife own?

They owned birds, goldfish, a dog, rabbits, a monkey, and a cat.

4. Who is Pluto? What is Pluto like?

Pluto is the cat. He was the narrator's favorite pet. The narrator describes Pluto as beautiful and all black. The cat often tried to roam the streets.

5. Why did the narrator's temperament start to change? How does it change?

He started drinking an excessive amount of alcohol. This caused him to become moody, irritable, and violent.

6. Why does Pluto bite the narrator? How does the narrator react?

The cat was avoiding the narrator due to his ill-temper, so the narrator seeks out the cat. Pluto feels threatened when the narrator tries to pick him up and so he bites the narrator. The narrator then take a knife and cuts out one of the cat's eyes.

7. What is the spirit of perverseness? What does it inspire the narrator to do?

It's the urge to do horrid things and to do wrong for the wrong's sake only. It inspired the narrator to "consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute," meaning he was going to kill the cat. He hung Pluto by the neck on a tree.

8. What happened the night that Pluto died?

The narrator's house burned down in a fire.

9. What does the narrator see on the wall of his home that was destroyed?

An image/apparition of a cat with a noose around its neck appeared.

10. Why does the narrator bring home another black cat?

He wants to assuage his guilt for killing Pluto and he knows it will please his wife.

11. Why does the narrator raise an axe to the new cat?

The cat almost tripped the narrator down the stairs on their way to the cellar.

12. How does the narrator's wife die?

The narrator kills her. She tried to stop her husband from killing the new cat, and so her husband put an axe in her brain, killing her instantly.

13. How does the narrator dispose of the body?

He walls the body up in the cellar. He removes some bricks to place her in the wall. He then puts the bricks back with mortar to conceal the body.

14. How does the narrator sleep after his wife's death?

He sleeps wonderfully because the cat has run away (he thinks) and so not even the guilt of killing his wife can get him upset as he is so happy that the cat has finally left him alone.

15. What happens four days after the murder?

The police arrive to investigate the narrator and they carefully search his home. They could not find any evidence.

16. How does the narrator's pride affect his behavior?

He brags to the police officers that he has an amazingly, well-constructed home and even shows them the walls and how solid they are... which prolongs their visit and raises suspicion.

17. How does the narrator get caught?

The cat howls from behind the wall, so the police take down the wall. They discover the decaying body of the narrator's wife and the crying cat which the narrator accidentally sealed in the tomb.

18. What foreshadowing does Poe use in this story? What effect does it have?

1) The narrator is on death row, so readers know he does something evil. 2) The outline of Pluto with a rope around his neck is on the wall after the fire. 3) The shape of the gallows is on the new cat. 4) The wife is so passive and sweet, that she becomes a victim of the narrator's evil side. 5) The second cat is missing after the narrator put his wife in the wall. All of these events build suspense in the story.

19. What is significant about the name Pluto?

Pluto is the Roman god of the Underworld.

20. Was the narrator's murderous ways inevitable? To go from killing animals to killing people?

Answers will vary.

21. What is ironic about the narrator fantasizing and actually killing his animals?

He once described himself as an animal lover and Pluto particularly was his favorite pet.

22. What is ironic about the narrator's home?

Home symbolizes a safe place. In this story, it is a place of evil. The narrator commits horrid crimes in his home and it is the opposite of a sanctuary.

23. Who or what do you think is to blame for the narrator's behavior?

Answers will vary.

24. Does the alcohol release the narrator's inner demons, or is it merely an excuse for his horrendous acts of violence?

Answers will vary.

25. In what ways is the narrator reliable and in what ways is he unreliable?

He is reliable because he is about to be killed and he wants to get the truth off his chest. He has nothing to gain from lying now. He is unreliable because he is an alcoholic criminal who admittedly finds joy in bringing pain to others.

Name:

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"The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe - Quote Analysis

Directions: Explain the meaning and significance of each quote below.

<p>"Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place -- some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects."</p>	
<p>"There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere Man."</p>	
<p>"In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise."</p>	
<p>"My disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!—and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish—even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper."</p>	
<p>"The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame."</p>	
<p>"When reason returned with the morning -- when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch -- I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed."</p>	

“And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart -- one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man.”

“Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not?”

“I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.”

“It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name -- and for this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster had I dared -- it was now, I say, the image of a hideous -- of a ghastly thing -- of the GALLOWES ! -- oh, mournful and terrible engine of Horror and of Crime -- of Agony and of Death!”

“Through the mere phrenzy of bravado, I rapped heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.”

“Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman.”

Answer Key
"The Black Cat" Edgar Allan Poe Quote Analysis

<p>Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place -- some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.</p> <p>"There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere Man."</p>	<p>The narrator is confessing every detail of what has happened to him: how he went from a caring, docile man to a brutal killer. He can't explain the supernatural coincidences that occurred and to which he blames his misfortune, but he hopes maybe someone else can read his story and figure out a more logical explanation.</p> <p>The narrator explains that animals are selfless and are loyal. They love man seemingly no matter what. This foreshadows how Pluto loves the narrator and follows him everywhere he goes. He later contradicts himself though, as he becomes enraged when his animals stay loyal to him through his abuse; he is not touched deeply by these behaviors.</p>
<p>In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise.</p>	<p>The narrator's wife joked Pluto was a witch in disguise, although she did not believe this and knew it was a superstition. This small remark may have accidentally put the idea into the narrator's head that the cat was evil. This supports the theme that people with fragile minds are more susceptible to suggestions and implications.</p>
<p>"...my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!—and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish—even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper."</p>	<p>This quote highlights the major conflict the narrator faces with himself and alcohol. It also sends the message to readers that drinking can bring out the worst in a human being.</p>
<p>"The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame."</p>	<p>This line is significant because it represents the narrator's transformation into insanity. His soul is leaving his body and he becomes truly evil.</p>
<p>"When reason returned with the morning -- when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch -- I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed."</p>	<p>The narrator slept off his indulgence in performing evil acts and the pleasure he took in killing the cat. Instead of feeling relieved or free, he felt horrible about what he'd done, but still feels like it isn't enough to change him. He turns to alcohol again, which leads him down a darker path. It shows that no matter how much evil he does, he will always want to do more.</p>
<p>"And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart -- one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man."</p>	<p>This quote highlights the theme that all human beings have a perverse, wicked side—another self. This is what provoked the narrator into doing evil things with no apparent motive other than the spirit of perverseness.</p>

<p>“Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not?”</p>	<p>The narrator is trying to become equals with the readers. He is trying to gain empathy and reduce his crimes to human nature... it could happen to anyone.</p>
<p>“I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.”</p>	<p>Here the narrator senses his hate for the new cat and sees it is getting worse. He tries to avoid the cat, like the plague, because he doesn't want to hurt the cat as he did Pluto. He becomes repulsed by the cat's presence anyway. This shows readers that the narrator has somewhat of a conscience as he tried not to hate the cat, but he just did.</p>
<p>“It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name -- and for this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster had I dared -- it was now, I say, the image of a hideous -- of a ghastly thing -- of the GALLOWS ! -- oh, mournful and terrible engine of Horror and of Crime -- of Agony and of Death!”</p>	<p>He is referring to the second cat's white spot which looked like the gallows, the structure in which executions occur. This is both foreshadowing and a foreboding detail. It makes readers question the sanity of the narrator (is he just seeing things?) and ultimately provokes the narrator into loathing the second cat.</p>
<p>“Through the mere phrenzy of bravado, I rapped heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.”</p>	<p>The narrator is being overly confident and exuberant by knocking on the wall where he buried his wife behind. The narrator's polite but unusual behavior makes the police suspicious of him and arouses the cat to reveal his secret.</p>
<p>Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman.</p>	<p>The narrator puts blame on the cat and does not take responsibility for his own actions. He says that the reason he is now being hanged is because the cat is actually the evil one, not him.</p>

Name:

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Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat"
After Reading Activities

Part A: Write an objective summary of the short story "The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe. You must use all six of the words in the box below.

perverse
alcohol

execution
superstition

insane
animals

Part B: Pick one of the following creative writing options from below.

Option 1: Pretend you are writing a newspaper article about the narrator on trial. Give him a name and a backstory. Tell readers what the narrator's claims are in opposition to what the police believe happened. Include a title for your article as well as a newspaper title (For example: *The New York Times*).

Option 2: Write a shortened version of the story from the point of view of Pluto the cat.

Option 3: Pretend you are a judge about to give a last minute pardon to the narrator. What evidence can you present to absolve the narrator of his sins and let him plea not-guilty by reason of insanity?