

Literary Comparison

**Directions:** Compare the two Edgar Allan Poe stories “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843) and “The Black Cat” (1842) using the charts below. Highlight any significant similarities or differences you find.

| Plot                |               |
|---------------------|---------------|
| The Tell-Tale Heart | The Black Cat |
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| Text Structure      |               |
|---------------------|---------------|
| The Tell-Tale Heart | The Black Cat |
|                     |               |

Characters

| The Tell-Tale Heart | The Black Cat |
|---------------------|---------------|
|                     |               |
|                     |               |
|                     |               |

Symbols

| The Tell-Tale Heart | The Black Cat |
|---------------------|---------------|
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Point of View

| The Tell-Tale Heart | The Black Cat |
|---------------------|---------------|
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Mood and Tone

| The Tell-Tale Heart | The Black Cat |
|---------------------|---------------|
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|                     |               |
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Themes

| The Tell-Tale Heart | The Black Cat |
|---------------------|---------------|
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Gothic Elements and Motifs

| The Tell-Tale Heart | The Black Cat |
|---------------------|---------------|
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|                     |               |

Style/Language

| The Tell-Tale Heart | The Black Cat |
|---------------------|---------------|
|                     |               |
|                     |               |

Answers will vary.

### Literary Comparison

**Directions:** Compare the two Edgar Allan Poe stories “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843) and “The Black Cat” (1842) using the charts below. Highlight any significant similarities or differences you find.

#### Plot

| The Tell-Tale Heart  | The Black Cat   |
|--|---|
| This story is set in the house where the narrator lives and shares with the old man. The bedroom is where the murder takes place.  | The major events in this story take place in the narrator's house and in local taverns. The murder takes place in the basement.   |
| The main conflict of this story is between <b>the narrator and the old man</b> . The narrator wants to rid the evil that resides in the old man's eye, therefore he must kill the old man.                                 | The main conflict occurs between <b>the narrator and himself</b> . Throughout the story, the narrator is fighting his urges to be violent. He cannot accept the blame of his actions and attributes his harmful thoughts to alcoholism.   |
| The narrator begins to watch the old man sleep every night. He is kind to the old man in order to not raise suspicion. On the eighth night of spying on the old man, the narrator charges the man with fury and kills him. | The narrator begins losing sanity and becomes easily irritable—having constant mood swings. He starts abusing his animals which is unusual because he described himself as a lover of animals. The narrator then kills and hang his cat Pluto. The narrator's house burns down. |
| The narrator takes precautions to conceal the body proving <b>the murder was premeditated and planned</b> . He dismembers the corpse in the tub and then hides the limbs under the floorboards.                            | The turning point of the story is when the narrator kills his wife. He puts an axe through her head. In order to dispose of her body, he buries her corpse behind the wall in the cellar. <b>This act was out of passion and in the heat of the moment.</b>                     |
| The police show up to the house after a neighbor called and heard a scream. They find nothing wrong at first. The narrator says the police did not suspect him.  | Four days after the murder, the police show up to investigate the missing person's report. The narrator says the police searched thoroughly because they suspected him, but they didn't find anything.  |
| The story ends with the narrator exclaiming he is guilty and it is presumed that he will be arrested by the police. <b>His guilty conscience got the best of him.</b>  | The narrator accidentally sealed the cat in the tomb, so when police hear its cries, they take down the wall and find the narrator's wife's body. <b>The narrator didn't have a conscience, he just made an error by being too brazen.</b>                                      |

## Text Structure

| The Tell-Tale Heart   | The Black Cat   |
|---|---|
| The narrator is telling the story from a place that is <b>not specified</b> ; maybe a prison or an institution for the criminally insane. | This tale is told from the prison cell of the narrator as he retells the events in his past homes that he previously shared with his wife and pets. |

## Characters

| The Tell-Tale Heart  | The Black Cat   |
|--|---|
| The narrator: he is <b>arrogant</b> , mentally unhinged, anxious, obsessive, afraid, and careful.                                  | The narrator: he is <b>arrogant</b> , lacks remorse, impulsive, egocentric, and manipulative.   |
| The old man: not much is known about him beside he is afraid when he hears a noise in the night. He is innocent as far as we know. | The narrator's wife: she is described as kind. She is loyal because she never leaves her husband no matter how low he sinks into the depths of depravity. |
| The police   | The police  |

## Symbols

| The Tell-Tale Heart   | The Black Cat  |
|---|--|
| The old man's eye is blue with a "film" or "veil" covering it. In the story, the man's eye symbolizes evil to the narrator. He refers to it as a "vulture's eye", and a vulture is a bird that feeds on one's dead flesh. This may further show why the narrator felt such fear around the old man—his eye caused the narrator uncontrollable terror, and he felt he was being preyed on. | The black cat Pluto was the narrator's favorite pet, but symbolized bad luck and a bad omen regarding the narrator's fate. Ever since the narrator killed Pluto and brought the new black cat into his house, things went from bad to worse. |
| The beating of the heart symbolizes the narrator's guilty conscience. The narrator probably heard his own heart beating in chest, but believes he hears the old man's heart.  | An image/apparition of a cat with a noose around its neck appeared after the fire; this symbolized how the fire was connected to the murder of Pluto. Pluto may have gotten revenge on the narrator.   |
| The narrator hides the body in the house under the floorboards. This symbolizes him trying to hide his guilt and bury his thoughts deep down, but despite his best effort, his thoughts find a way to trickle out.  | The shape of the gallows on the new cat symbolizes a bad omen for the narrator and foreshadows his execution.  |



### Point of View

| The Tell-Tale Heart   | The Black Cat  |
|---|--|
| Unnamed narrator, first person point of view. He claims he is not mad, meaning he is not crazy, but he obviously is. The narrator is unreliable because of his mental state.  | Unnamed narrator, first person point of view. He claims he is not mad, and that though he committed an awful crime, he is a regular person. He had good parents, a tender heart, a loving wife... he hopes that readers will relate to him. He is unreliable because he is condemned to death and might say anything to avoid execution. |
| The narrator kills because he believes the eye must be destroyed because it is haunting him. Readers believe that the narrator believes this. The narrator takes it upon himself to confess to the police of his crime and shows them the evidence. | The narrator claims he is taken over by the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Readers have to decide if they believe his claim or not. The narrator ultimately puts blame on the cat for his wife's death and does not take responsibility for his own actions.  |

### Mood and Tone

| The Tell-Tale Heart   | The Black Cat   |
|---|---|
| The overall tone is very tense. The narrator is anxious and nervous throughout the story, even when he believes he is being cunning, he sounds like a madman. He comes across as very neurotic, like he has no control over his thoughts or actions.  | The overall tone of the narrator is matter-of-fact. The narrator may be trying to manipulate readers to feel sympathy for him; he presents his information like it could happen to anyone. He hopes maybe someone else can read his story and figure out a more logical explanation for his drastic change in character. His voice is casual. |
| The narrator felt remorse. Though he still believed that he was ridding the world of evil and had no choice, he felt enough guilt to admit the crime to the police.   | The narrator does not feel remorse. He is relieved when he kills his wife. "My happiness was supreme!" Because the cat was gone, he felt satisfied.   |
| Similarly to how the narrator feels, the readers feel anxious as well. The mood is creepy, terrifying, and scared. Readers are afraid because the narrator is insane and unpredictable. Nothing he says make much sense and readers don't know what he will do next, but he is obviously capable of great evil. | The mood of the story is that of shock and disgust. As readers hear how the felon has abused and mistreated his wife and animals, there is little sympathy to be had. His plea that he is possessed by a demon is unconvincing. The mood is horrific, dark, and disturbed.  |

## Themes

| The Tell-Tale Heart   | The Black Cat  |
|---|--|
| The pressure and guilt will always get the better of you. Even though the narrator stands by his decision, his guilt would not allow him to stay quiet and the truth came out.  | The truth will always come out—just as the cat made itself known and the narrator was caught; justice will be served.  |
| If you become obsessed with something, it will take on a life of its' own. The narrator became so infatuated with the vulture eye that he made irreversible decisions.  | Someone's inner demons can manifest into physical sociopathic behaviors if not managed properly.   |
| Mental health can put people in harmful situations if they are left alone with no help. The narrator had no one taking care of him, that we know of, and his isolation led him down a train of thought that was untrue. No one could probably convince him otherwise that the eye was not evil. | People who believe in superstitions and supernatural are more likely to be doomed by them. 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. |
| People will always do what they must to protect themselves. The narrator felt he had to rid the eye.  | All humans are capable of evil. Even the narrator who loved animals and loved his wife, was drawn to the perverse and committed these unlikely acts.   |
| Just because someone claims something, does not make it true. The narrator says he is not mad, but it is obvious to readers that he is.   | Restless or idle hands are dangerous. The narrator began drinking for whatever reason, and spent all his time at the pubs. If he had been busy working or had purpose elsewhere, he may not have gone down this evil path.   |



## Gothic Elements and Motifs

| The Tell-Tale Heart   | The Black Cat  |
|---|--|
| The narrator believes the eye is cursed and insists his blood ran cold whenever he saw it. The evil eye had a life of its own, and the old man was just a casualty along the way. An "Evil Eye" is a superstition where people can cause harm to others, just with their eyes.  | Evil thoughts infiltrated the narrator's mind. He felt he was possessed by a demon, the spirit of the perverse.  |
| The narrator brutally murders the old man whom he shared a home with.   | The narrator brutally murdered the cat Pluto and then his wife.  |
| Darkness and isolation—the narrator spends nights alone in the dark watching the old man which only adds to his fury and anxiousness.   | Bad omens or warnings—the fire, the cat's silhouette, and the gallows on the fur foreshadowed evil was coming.   |
| The narrator is proud of his deed as he is explaining it to readers. He tells readers how they should have seen how carefully and professionally he carried out the murder. He was so proud when the police came, that he had them stick around to rest after their search. If they left sooner, he may not have gotten caught. | Pride/irony—the narrator boasts about how well he hid the corpse which is ironic since he made a huge error by also hiding the cat in the wall too. His pride gets him caught.                                   |
| Poe slowly builds suspense in the story because readers know the the narrator is stalking the old man waiting for the right moment to kill him. Every night he watches the old man sleep, he stays so quiet, and readers never know when he is going to make a move.  | Poe builds suspense in this story because we know the narrator is in prison, and thus has already committed a heinous crime. After the second cat goes missing, readers are eager to hear what will happen next. |

## Style/Language

| The Tell-Tale Heart   | The Black Cat  |
|---|--|
| The story is very emotionally driven. Poe uses the narrator's madness to instill fear in the readers. Repetition, suspense, and unpredictability add to the fear in this story. The fact that the reader sometimes talks to the audience (he says, "you") makes readers feel more involved. | This story is more up for interpretation as readers really question the intention of the narrator and whether he is being honest or not. This story is thought-provoking but the violence makes it very upsetting. |

## **“The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” Text-Dependent Analysis (TDA) Rubric**

**TASK:** Write a five paragraph essay highlighting your literary analyses of both short stories “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.” You will analyze how two texts that share similar plots and are written by the same author are developed and portrayed differently. Use the literary comparison chart to help you.

### **CONTENT: 20 POINTS**

- Writer analyzes how two texts by the same author treat similar topics and themes.
- Writer analyzes how two texts with similar conflicts are developed and portrayed differently.
- Writer develops a strong thesis with the support of relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
- Writer draws at least three pieces of evidence from each story to support analyses and reflection.
- Essay is a minimum of 5 paragraphs in length and paragraphs are all an appropriate length for grade level.

### **FOCUS: 20 POINTS**

- Writer establishes and develops a thesis statement and completes all sections of the task without getting off topic.
- Writer explains how all evidence provided directly supports the thesis.
- Writer produces clear and coherent writing in which the development is appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

### **ORGANIZATION: 20 POINTS**

- Writer organizes complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions.
- Writer uses appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
- Writer uses at least two transitional words or phrases in every paragraph.
- The writer’s supporting reasons are organized intentionally, explained clearly, and easy to follow.
- Writer introduces the topic and thesis statement to audience in the introduction paragraph and is followed with evidence in the body paragraphs.
- Writer provides a conclusion that supports the information or explanation presented.

### **STYLE: 20 POINTS**

- Writers uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to explain the topic.
- Writer establishes and maintains a formal style.
- Writer uses an objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

### **CONVENTIONS AND FORMAT: 20 POINTS**

- Writer uses proper grammar, mechanics, usage, and punctuation.
- Writer has very few errors that do not impact or take away from the readability of the essay.
- Writer has typed essay using proper format (specified by teacher).
- Writer turns essay in on time.

**Due Date:**

**Total Points: 100**