

Name _____ Class _____

“The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe

Part I: Anticipation Guide

Read the following statements before reading the story. If you agree, put a check in the AGREE column; if you disagree, put a check in the DISAGREE column.

Agree	Disagree	Statement
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_____	_____	1. People who are insane know that they are insane.
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_____	_____	2. People who are insane are dangerous.
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_____	_____	3. Everyone who commits murder is insane.
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_____	_____	4. People who commit crimes feel guilty afterward.
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_____	_____	5. People who murder others usually have good reasons.
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_____	_____	6. All people are afraid of the same things.
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_____	_____	7. Only unintelligent criminals get caught.
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_____	_____	8. It's the little things that people do that are the most annoying.
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_____	_____	9. If you're medically insane, you can't be held accountable for your actions.
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_____	_____	10. When you've done something wrong, wondering if you'll get caught can cause terrible anxiety.
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Part II: During Reading Questions

Use complete sentences, and answer each part of the question thoroughly.
Answer the following questions while you read the story.

PREVIEW

1. Who is narrating the story? Is it first, second, or third person point of view?

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

2. What is your first impression of the narrator? Explain.

PREVIEW

3. What, specifically, is it about the old man that troubles the narrator?

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

4. What does the narrator do every night? Why does he do it?

PREVIEW

5. How does the narrator feel *immediately* after he commits murder?

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

6. How does the narrator get caught by the police?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Part III: After Reading Questions

Use complete sentences, and answer every part of the question in its entirety.
Use textual evidence when necessary.

PREVIEW

1. How does Edgar Allan Poe build suspense in the story?

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2. What evidence is there that the narrator is unreliable? Or at what point did you know you could not trust him?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

3. What is one way the narrator tries to prove that he is not insane? How does that add to his or her unreliability?

PREVIEW

4. What do you think drove the narrator to confess?

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

5. Give an example from the text where Poe uses language to establish the mood of horror and fear in the story.

PREVIEW

6. Figure out what the title means. "The Tell-Tale Heart." Explain.

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Answer Key Part II and III

Part II: During Reading Questions

1. Who is narrating the story? Is it first, second, or third person point of view?

The narrator is unnamed. The story is told from first-person point of view.

2. What is your first impression of the narrator? Explain.

Answers will vary. He seems mentally unstable because he exclaims that he is very nervous and that he can “hear things” in heaven, hell, and earth.

3. What, specifically, is it about the old man that troubles the narrator?

The narrator is disturbed by the old man’s eye. He says, “he had the eye of a vulture - a pale blue eye, with a film over it.” The narrator believes the eye must be evil because it is haunting him.

4. What does the narrator do every night? Why does he do it?

The narrator sneaks into the old man’s bedroom every night and watches him sleep for a week. He wants to learn the old man’s routine and wait for the vulture eye to open, so he can get rid of it.

5. How does the narrator feel *immediately* after he commits murder?

The narrator feels relieved and proud after killing the old man. He states, “His eye would trouble me no more.” He smiles even when the police arrive because he is not worried about getting caught.

6. How does the narrator get caught by the police?

The narrator confesses to police where he has hid the body. “I shrieked, dissemble no more! I admit the deed! - tear up the planks! here, here! - it is the beating of his hideous heart!”

Part III: After Reading Questions

1. How does Edgar Allan Poe build suspense in the story?

Answers will vary. Poe uses repetition in his story to illustrate how mentally unstable the narrator is. For example, he says, “cautiously - oh, so cautiously - cautiously.” In the very beginning of the story, the narrator also insinuates that the reader thinks of him as “mad” to which the narrator gets defensive and says

he is just nervous. Knowing the narrator is unreliable builds suspense because the readers don't know what such an unpredictable character is capable of.

2. What evidence is there that the narrator is unreliable? Or At what point did you know you could not trust him?

Answers will vary. The narrator believes that the old man's eye with cataracts is evil and a curse. This makes me question his sanity. When the narrator states, "I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him," is when I knew I could not trust him because he is plotting a murder and yet pretending to be friends with the old man.

3. What is one way the narrator tries to prove that he is not insane? How does that add to his or her unreliability?

Answers will vary. The narrator tries to justify killing the old man. He says, "I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult." He is explaining to readers that the eye is evil and must be destroyed and that it has nothing to do with the old man. This justification shows he is trying to deny that he is crazy; however, this just makes him sound more crazy because he is going to kill a seemingly nice old man for no reason.

4. What do you think drove the narrator to confess?

Answers will vary. I believe the narrator became paranoid that the evil was not actually gone. He could still hear the beating heart of the old man, which is impossible. He probably felt guilty for what he had done and thus, imagined the sound. The only way to escape the noise was to confess to police.

5. Give an example from the text where Poe uses language to establish the mood of horror and fear in the story.

Answers will vary. When the narrator is in the old man's room on the eighth night, he describes the scene as dark and silent. There is dramatic irony, as readers know the narrator is about to kill the old man, and yet the old man has no idea. "And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror." The narrator is feeling exhilarated at the thought of the old man's fear (his heart beating faster and faster).

6. Figure out what the title means. "The Tell-Tale Heart." Explain.

The title The Tell-Tale Heart refers to the beating heart at the end of the story. The police believed the narrator's initial story that the old man was out of town, but the heart caused him to confess. The heart "told" the "tale" of what really occurred that night.