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Influenced by the English Romantic poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Lord” George Gordon Byron, and Percy Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe represents one of the essential American Romantic poets of the nineteenth century. Romanticism here refers to a literary movement of the late 1700s and 1800s which focused on the emotional life of the individual and curiosity about the self. This movement complemented a larger geopolitical and ideological shift in the United States. As a young nation forged a path into the West, so its writers and philosophers explored the unknown territory of the human mind.Some Romantic poets, like the transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, saw potential for positive revelations within the self. Reflecting his belief in the inherent goodness of people, Emerson’s poetry spotlights lovely elements like natural features, water, and light. Poe, on the other hand, was interested in plumbing the darker depths of the human psyche. He uses gloomy Gothic set pieces and nightmarish sequences to suggest that self-reliance and turning inwards results not in enlightenment, but terror and anxiety. The human mind, Poe contends, needs no assistance from spooky exteriors: It is fully capable of creating horror from within. This theme of self-generated, internal torment plays a prominent role in “The Raven.”Poe’s works defy categorization. They contain elements of detective fiction, Gothic thrillers, Victorian love poetry, and even comedy. He is sometimes credited as the creator of the modern short story, and his tales, including “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and “The Cask of Amontillado” are among the most widely known in the literary world. His critical opinions were also influential, especially the idea that poetry must be musical, that it should focus on beauty over truth, and that it must elevate the soul.Poe desired above all to be known as a poet, though he only wrote around fifty poems in total. His narrative poem “The Raven” is his most popular work, though others such as “Annabel Lee” and “Ulalume” are also widely read. Poe’s poetry features rigid rhyme schemes and stanza patterns. His speakers are always unnamed males—though it is tempting to read his poems as autobiographical, it is more likely that they represent an exercise in the subjective exploration of emotion, as did the works of other Romantic poets of his time. Poe’s speakers often embark on a literal journey or a journey of the mind. Starting from a place of rational credibility, they are gradually unseated and made unreliable by their emotions. “The Raven” fits this mold. The poem came to be associated so powerfully with Poe that the author himself is sometimes referred to as “the Raven.”Poet BiographyEdgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts on January 19, 1809, but spent most of his youth in the South. His father, David Poe, abandoned the family while Poe was young; his mother, the actress Elizabeth Poe, died soon after the family’s move to Richmond, Virginia. Poe took the name “Allan” from his foster father there, John Allan.After years of private schooling, Poe enrolled at the University of Virginia in 1826. He excelled in Classics and Modern Languages, but left the following year after racking up substantial gambling debts. Financial troubles would plague Poe throughout his life. His poverty drove him to write popular (and financially lucrative) works, and he proved to have an eye for up-and-coming trends in the publishing world. After a brief stint in the army, Poe served variously as editor, contributor, and literary critic for publications throughout the eastern seaboard.In 1836 he married his cousin, Virginia Clemm. After ten years of living an itinerant writer’s lifestyle, the Poes finally settled in Fordham, New York in 1844. Three years later Virginia died of tuberculosis, but Poe’s career saw an upswing, particularly after the success of “The Raven,” which was published in 1845. Various scandals, however, coupled with the death of Virginia, contributed to Poe’s drinking problem. The cause of his death on October 7, 1849, after collapsing in the streets of Baltimore a few days prior, remains unknown, but may have been related to his abuse of alcohol.Poem TextOnce 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 some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.“‘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 From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore— Nameless here for evermore. And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtainThrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before; So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating “‘Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—This is and nothing more.” Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer, “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. 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!”— 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 thereat is, and this mystery explore—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; Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he; But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—Perched upon a bust of Pallas 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,“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven,Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!” Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.” Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,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.” But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke onlyThat 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.” 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—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 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 expressingTo the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom’s core; 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! Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censerSwung by Seraphim 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 from thy memories of Lenore;Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!” Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.” “Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—Whether Tempter 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?—tell me—tell me, I implore!” 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, It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—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! 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 sittingOn the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door; 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!Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Raven.” 1845. Poetry Foundation. Summary“The Raven” opens on a wintry night in December. The speaker is an exhausted student or scholar, dozing as he reads, when he hears a sudden knocking at the door. He opens it, but there is no-one there. Startled and increasingly superstitious, he whispers a question: “Lenore?” The word is echoed back to him.Back in the chamber the speaker ponders what this could mean. He hears the tapping again, this time from the window. He thinks it must be the wind, but instead a raven enters and perches on a bust of Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and the arts.At first the speaker finds the sight of such a serious bird amusing. He remarks on its boldness—this bird is not “craven,” or a coward, even though it seems to sport the shorn hairstyle of a disgraced medieval knight. In jokingly elevated language (to match the raven’s kingly appearance), the speaker requests the bird’s name. The raven replies, “Nevermore.”The speaker, falling back into his grief, suggests the bird will probably fly away and leave him soon, just like his hopes and friends. The raven replies “Nevermore” again, suggesting this time that it will never leave the speaker’s chamber. The speaker is startled by how uncannily fitting the raven’s response is. He tries to rationalize the experience: The raven doesn’t know what it’s saying, it’s just repeating a phrase it learned from a former owner. Still, the bird’s fiery eyes unsettle him. The velvet lining of the chair he’s sitting in reminds him, suddenly, of his lost Lenore, and how she will never sit here with him again.The speaker thinks he smells church incense, perhaps swung by an angel (a seraphim), and accuses the raven of being sent by God to make him forget Lenore. He compares the bird to nepenthe, a drug of forgetfulness first mentioned in Homer’s Odyssey. Again, the raven replies “Nevermore.”The speaker pivots to accusing the raven of being sent by the Devil, or perhaps arriving here by random chance. Its strange confidence makes him wonder if it has some special knowledge to share. He references the Bible, Jeremiah 8:22, asking if there is “balm in Gilead”; in effect, he wants to know if there is any hope of relief from his sorrow. Again, the raven says “Nevermore,” implying this time that the speaker will never recover from the loss of Lenore.Increasingly desperate, the speaker asks if he will at least meet Lenore in “Aidenn,” an alternate spelling of Eden, meaning heaven. Again, the raven tells him “Nevermore.” His grief changed to rage, the speaker demands the bird return to “Night’s Plutonian shore,” or hell (Pluto is the Roman god of the Underworld, and “Plutonian shore” refers to the Styx, a river there). The raven refuses to leave.In the last stanza, the speaker shifts from the past tense to the present. The poem ends with a confirmation that the raven perches still on the bust of Pallas above the speaker’s chamber door. Fact Checked Content Last Updated: 03.02.2023 16 min reading time Content creation process designed by Content cross-checked by Content quality checked by Poem"The Raven"WriterEdgar Allan PoePublished1845 in the New York Evening MirrorStructure18 stanzas of six lines eachRhyme schemeABCBBBMeterTrochaic octameterSound devicesAlliteration, refrainToneSomber, tragicThemeDeath, grief"The Raven" is told in first-person point of view. The speaker, an unnamed man, is alone late on a December night. While reading in his chamber, or study, to forget his sorrows over recently losing his love, Lenore, he suddenly hears a knocking. This is odd considering it is midnight. He opens his study door, peeks out, and out of hopelessness he whispers Lenore's name. The speaker hears tapping again, and he finds a raven tapping on the window. He opens his window, and the raven flies in and perches on a bust of Pallas Athena, just above the study's door.In first-person point of view, the narrator is within the action of the story, or narrative, and is sharing the details from their perspective. This form of narration uses the pronouns "I" and "we."At first, the speaker finds the situation humorous and is amused by this new guest. He even asks its name. To the narrator's surprise, the raven responds, "Nevermore" (line 48). Then, speaking aloud to himself, the speaker flippantly says that the raven will leave in the morning. To the narrator's alarm, the bird responds "Nevermore" (line 60). The narrator sits and stares at the raven, wondering its intent and the meaning behind the croaked word, "nevermore."The narrator thinks of Lenore, and at first feels the presence of goodness. The narrator tries to enter into conversation with the raven by asking a series of questions, to which the raven repeatedly responds with "nevermore." The word begins to haunt the narrator, along with the memories of his lost love. The speaker's attitude towards the raven changes, and he begins to see the bird as a "thing of evil" (line 91). The speaker tries to kick the raven out of the chamber, but it does not budge. The last stanza of the poem, and the reader's last image, is of the raven with a "demon's" eyes (line 105) sitting ominously and continuously on the bust of Athena, above the speaker's chamber door.Fig. 1 - The speaker in the poem watches a raven."The Raven" is a macabre tale of mourning, misery, and madness. Poe achieves the somber and tragic tone in "The Raven" through carefully chosen diction and setting. Tone, which is a writer's attitude toward the subject or character, is expressed through the specific words they choose regarding the topics addressed.Diction is the specific word choice a writer employs to create a certain effect, tone, and mood.Poe's diction in "The Raven" features words like "dreary" (line 1), "bleak" (line 7), "sorrow" (line 10), "grave" (line 44), and "ghastly" (line 71) to communicate a dark and ominous scene. Although the chamber is a familiar setting to the speaker, it becomes a scene of psychological torture—a mental prison for the speaker where he remains locked in grief and sorrow. Poe's choice to use a raven, a bird often associated with loss and ill omens because of its ebony plumage, is noteworthy.In Norse mythology, the central god Odin is associated with magic, or the fantastic, and runes. Odin was also the god of poets. He owned two ravens named Huginn and Muninn. Huginn is an antiquated Norse word for "thought" while Muninn is Norse for "memory."Poe establishes the setting in "The Raven" to express feelings of isolation and loneliness. It is the dark of night and desolate. The speaker is in a stupor because of lack of sleep and feels weak. Poe also harnesses thoughts of death as the poem begins by referencing the winter and the glow of a fire dying out.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 some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door."(lines 1-4)In literature, midnight is often an ominous time as shadows lurk, the dark blankets over the day, and it becomes hard to see. The speaker is alone on a night that is "dreary" or boring, and he is physically weak and tired. In a sleepy stupor, he is jolted to awareness by a tapping, which interrupts his thoughts, sleep, and silence. 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 From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—"(lines 7-10)While the speaker sits in solitude within his chamber, outside it is December. December is the heart of winter, a season itself marked by a lack of life. Surrounded by death on the outside, the chamber itself lacks life, as "each separate dying ember wrought its ghost" (line 8) on the floor. The internal fire, what is keeping him warm, is dying out and inviting in the cold, the darkness, and death. The speaker sits, hoping for the morning, as he reads to try to forget the pain of losing his love, Lenore. Within the first ten lines, Poe creates an enclosed setting. In his essay, "Philosophy of Composition" (1846), Poe notes that his intent in "The Raven" was to create what he called "a close circumscription of space" to force concentrated attention. The intense focus and the isolated setting surrounded by death work together to build suspense from the onset of the poem and establish the somber and tragic tone that is carried throughout.Two controlling themes in "The Raven" are death and grief. At the forefront of much of Poe's writing is the theme of death. This is also true for "The Raven." In Poe's "Philosophy of Composition" he asserts "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" and the loss is best expressed from the "the lips ... of a bereaved lover." The narrative poem "The Raven" is centered around this very idea. The poem's speaker has experienced what seems like a life-changing and personal loss. Although the reader never sees Lenore's actual death, we feel the tremendous pain as expressed through her mourning lover—our narrator. Although Lenore is in everlasting sleep, the narrator seems to be in a form of limbo, enclosed in a chamber of solitude and unable to sleep. As his mind wanders on thoughts of Lenore, he tries to find solace "[f]rom [his] books" (line 10).However, all around him are reminders of death: It is midnight, the embers from the fire are dying, darkness is all around, and he is visited by a bird that is ebony in color. The bird's name, and the only answer he provides our narrator with, is the single word "nevermore." This haunting refrain reminds the narrator over and over again that he will never see Lenore again. The raven, a visual reminder of ever-present death, is placed at the top of his door. As a result, the narrator falls into madness with his own haunting thoughts of death and the loss he has suffered.Grief is another theme present in "The Raven." The poem deals with the inescapable nature of grief, and its ability to sit at the forefront of one's mind. Even when thoughts are occupied by other things, like books, grief can come "tapping" and "rapping" at your "chamber door" (lines 3-4). Whether it is with a whisper or a pounding, grief is incessant and stubborn. Like the raven in the poem, it can appear stately, as a collected reminder and memory, or as a haunting—creeping up when least expected. The speaker of the poem seems to be locked in his own state of grief. He is alone, dejected, and seeks loneliness as he pleads with the raven to "[l]eave [his] loneliness unbroken" (line 100) and "quit the bust" (line 100) above his door. Grief often seeks solitude and turns inward. The speaker, the very figure of seclusion, can't even bear the presence of another living creature. Instead, he wants to be surrounded by death, perhaps even longing for it in his grief. As an ultimate example of the corrosive nature of grief, the speaker slips deeper into madness the longer he remains in isolation. He is locked within his chamber of grief.It is important to note that Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess, is a symbol of wisdom and of war. Poe's use of this statue above the narrator's door emphasizes that his thoughts are troubling him and are literally weighed down by grief and death. As long as the bird is perched upon Pallas's bust, his mind will be at war with his sorrow.What do you think? What would your essay analyzing tone, diction, or poetic devices look like if you were explaining a certain theme you have identified in "The Raven"?Fig. 2 - "The Raven" alludes to Athena, the Greek goddess of battle, strategy, and wisdom.Edgar Allan Poe was inspired to write "The Raven" after having reviewed a book by Dickens, Barnaby Rudge (1841), which featured Dickens's pet raven, Grip. While Dickens was on tour, Poe arranged a meeting with him and his pet raven.2 Although Grip reportedly had an extensive vocabulary, there is no account indicating he used the word "nevermore." Drawing from his experience with the raven, Poe fashioned his own ebony bird, Nevermore, now immortalized in his poem, "The Raven."Fig. 3 - The book Barnaby Rudge was an influential read for Poe and served to introduce him to Grip, Dickens's pet raven and the inspiration for "The Raven."Two central literary devices used by Poe bring meaning to the melancholy narrative poem: alliteration and refrain.Poe's use of alliteration creates a cohesive framework.Alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant sound at the start of words within a line or over several lines of verse.Alliteration provides a rhythmic beat, similar to the sound of a beating heart.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!”— Merely this and nothing more.(lines 25-30)The hard "d" sound featured in the words "deep, darkness, doubting, dreaming, dreams, dared" and "dream" (line 25-26) mimics the strong thumping of a heartbeat and phonetically expresses the drumming the narrator feels within his chest. The hard consonant sound also speeds up the reading, creating an intensity within the narrative by manipulating sound. The softer "s" sound in the words "silence, stillness," and "spoken" slow the narrative down, and create a quieter, more ominous mood. As the action in the narrative slows more, and drops into an almost pause, the soft "w" sound is emphasized in the words "was", "whispered", "word" and "whispered" again.The second key sound device is refrain.Refrain is a word, line, or part of a line repeated through the course of a poem, and typically at the end of stanzas.A refrain is often used to emphasize ideas or reinforce the main theme in a piece. Poe used refrain, but by his own admission he altered the idea behind the refrain to mean something different each time. Poe's aim, as stated in "The Philosophy of Composition" was to manipulate the refrain in "The Raven" to "produce continuously novel effects, by the variation of the application of the refrain." He used the same word, but manipulated the language around the word so its meaning would change, depending on the context.For example, the first instance of the refrain "Nevermore" (line 48) indicates the raven's name. The next refrain, in line 60, explains the bird's intent to leave from the chamber "Nevermore." The next instances of refrain, in lines 66 and 72, show the narrator contemplating the origin and meaning behind the bird's singular word. The next refrain ends with his answer, as this time the word "nevermore" in line 78 means Lenore will never "press" or live again. "Nevermore" in lines 84, 90, and 96 show hopelessness. The narrator will be doomed to always remember Lenore, and consequently, he will forever feel the pain. He will also find no "balm" (line 89) or healing ointment to dull his pain, his emotional anguish.The two concluding stanzas, which also end in the refrain "nevermore" symbolize physical torment and spiritual torment. Falling into deep psychological suffering in line 101, the speaker demands the bird to...Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"The descriptive language portrays physical pain. The bird's beak is stabbing at the narrator's heart, which is the center life source of the body. Whereas the refrain "nevermore" previously had a literal meaning as the raven's moniker, it is now a sign of visceral heartbreak. The speaker, submitting to his fate, states in line 107...And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor"The narrator's soul is being crushed, not by the raven, but by his mere shadow. The torture the narrator feels from the grief, the loss, and the raven's incessant presence is a reminder that sorrow transcends the physical and goes into the spiritual. His despair is inescapable, and as the final line asserts...Shall be lifted--nevermore!"This last refrain in line 108 establishes an eternal torment for the narrator.Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" is about how the human mind deals with death, the inescapable nature of grief, and its ability to destroy. Because the narrator is in a secluded state, there is no genuine evidence to affirm whether the raven is real, as it can be a construct of his own imagination. However, the experience and grief he has are real. We see the narrator, his composure, and his mental state decline slowly with each passing stanza. The raven, a "bird of ill omen" according to Poe, stands perched on an emblem of wisdom, the goddess Athena herself, yet the raven is a symbol of inescapable thoughts of grief. There is a battle within the speaker's psyche—between his ability to reason and his overwhelming misery. As the use of the refrain evolves from the very literal meaning of the raven's name to a source of metaphysical persecution, we see the damaging effects of Lenore's death and the narrator's response to it. His inability to control his sadness is destructive and results in a kind of self-imprisonment. The narrator's own thoughts and sorrow become a binding force, disabling, and putting a stop to his life. For the narrator, his grief locked him in a state of instability and insanity. He can't live a normal life, locked away in his chamber—a figurative coffin."The Raven" is a narrative poem written by Edgar Allan Poe. It first was published in 1845 in the New York Evening Mirror, and it was well-received. "The Raven" uses the devices of alliteration and refrain to reveal themes of death and grief. Poe uses diction and setting to establish a somber and tragic tone."The Raven" is told in first-person point of view and is about the narrator, who is mourning the death of his beloved Lenore, when a raven named "Nevermore" comes to visit, and then refuses to leave.1. Isani, Mukhtar Ali. "Poe and 'The Raven': Some Recollections." Poe Studies. June 1985.2. Runcie, Catherine A. "Edgar Allan Poe: Psychic Patterns in the Later Poems." Australasian Journal of American Studies. December 1987. What is "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe about? "The Raven" is told in first person point of view and is about the narrator, who is mourning the death of his beloved Lenore, when a raven named "Nevermore" comes to visit, and then refuses to leave. Why did Edgar Allan Poe write "The Raven"? In Poe's "Philosophy of Composition" he asserts "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" and the loss is best expressed from the "the lips ... of a bereaved lover." He wrote "The Raven" to reflect this idea. What is the meaning behind "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe? Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" is about how the human mind deals with death, the inescapable nature of grief, and its ability to destroy. How does Edgar Allan Poe build suspense in "The Raven"? The intense focus and isolated setting, surrounded by death, work together to build suspense from the onset of the poem and establish the somber and tragic tone that is carried throughout the poem. What inspired Edgar Allan Poe to write "The Raven"? Edgar Allan Poe was inspired to write "The Raven" after having reviewed a book by Dickens, Barnaby Rudge (1841), and meeting with him and Dickens's pet raven, Grip. 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The cutting-edge technology and tools we provide help students create their own learning materials. StudySmarter’s content is not only expert-verified but also regularly updated to ensure accuracy and relevance. Learn more Page 2 Fact Checked Content Last Updated: 30.09.2022 13 min reading time Content creation process designed by Content cross-checked by Content quality checked by 77 Dream Songs was John Berryman's first majorly successful collection of poetry. Published in 1964, the book was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1965. Berryman was not a new poet at the time of publication, but the book's instant success was a surprise to many critics.Berryman had published his first mature collection of poetry, The Dispossessed, in 1948 to overwhelmingly negative reviews. His book-length poem, Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, (1956) was successful, but it was 77 Dream Songs that established Berryman's literary reputation.Much of the content of 77 Dream Songs was inspired by Berryman's own life. He was born in Oklahoma in 1914, and had a troubled childhood. As Berryman's parents were finalizing their divorce, his father committed suicide. Berryman's mother remarried within months and frequently criticized his dead father, causing Berryman further pain.At the time 77 Dream Songs was published, the adult Berryman was struggling with alcoholism and depression. The protagonist of the collection, Henry, serves as Berryman's alter-ego, as he struggles with much of the same challenges that Berryman faced. Henry experiences depression and alcoholism and contemplates suicide in more than one poem.Fig. 1 - Henry functions as Berryman's alter ego as he experiences much of the same trauma as Berryman.Four years after 77 Dream Songs, Berryman continued Henry's story with His Toy, His Dream, His Rest (1968). This collection was also a major success, and in 1969, Berryman combined the two books into The Dream Songs, which contained 385 individual poems.Berryman took his own life in 1972 by jumping off of a bridge.77 Dream Songs is in the genre of poetry and can be more specifically listed as lyric poetry. The collection follows the narrator, Henry, while he navigates a dream world that hovers between reality and imagination. The odd syntax and vague imagery used throughout 77 Dream Songs highlights that things are not quite as they should be.Henry strongly resembles Berryman himself: a white, middle-aged American who attempts to cope with both his desire and despair. The collection functions as a dream diary as Henry struggles with his trauma and the loss from his past. Henry is plagued by depression and is disillusioned by his life. He yearns to make a connection with others but is restricted by his mental state. His only friend, who calls Henry "Mr. Bones," is hostile and deeply problematic.Mr. Bones is a controversial figure. Henry's alter ego, he dresses in blackface and speaks in an exaggerated Southern, Black dialect. As a liberal writer, many scholars have wondered why Berryman appears to be reverting to crude, racist stereotypes. While some say he is poking fun at minstrelsy in America's dark past, others argue that his use of Black dialect is inherently wrong and harmful. What is your interpretation?Each of the 77 poems can be read independently, but Berryman intended them to be read as part of a sequence. By the end of the 77 dream songs, Henry has not overcome his demons and is still struggling with loneliness, sadness, and guilt. Henry's dream world is continued in Berryman's following collection, His Toy, His Dream, His Rest (1968).In order to analyze the collection as a whole, let's look at some of the individual poems and analyze what they reveal about Henry.Devoid of any world-building or scene-setting, "Dream Song 1" dives immediately into Henry's mental state:Huffy Henry hid the day,unappeasable Henry sulked." (1-2)Readers are immediately tuned into Henry's character and the problems he faces. The poem states that the entire world seemed to be on his side at one point. It was like a "wool lover" (7)—warm and comforting but also scratchy and imperfect. After the "departure" (9) from this happiness, "nothing fell out as it might or ought" (10). Henry has experienced a deep betrayal that has caused lingering trauma. His poor attitude is directly linked to his shaken mental state and the despair that he faces every day. The speaker states that he doesn't know how Henry survived. Henry isn't simply an unlikeable villain, he is a complex, hurting human being whose happiness was lost to his trauma."Dream Song 4" is important in showing how Henry relates to other people. Instead of being able to connect with others on an emotional, human level, Henry has no feelings of empathy. He views people like they are objects and oddities. When he sees an attractive woman, he notes,...I hungered backand only the fact of her husband & four other peoplekept me from springing on her" (4-6)While this quote speaks to Henry's feelings of intense desire and longing, it also shows that sees himself as separate from "other people." He is unable to consider either the woman or the people she's with as humans with agency, but he sees them as objects of desire or obstacles in his way. His lack of empathy is likely intricately tied to his inability to connect with his own emotions and heal from his trauma. This perpetuates a cycle of loneliness where Henry can't get close to anyone. The second to last line in the poem reads, "Where did it all go wrong? There ought to be a law against Henry" (17).Fig. 2 - Henry's isolation is revealed as he watches a woman eating."Dream Song 14" reveals how Henry's pain has changed the way he views the world as a whole. The poem famously begins, "Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so" (1). Henry states that nothing in life excites him anymore. Although he knows people shouldn't say they're bored of living, he is. He can't find any enjoyment in art, literature, other people, or even himself. At the end of the poem, Henry reveals why he is bored: his companion has left him and he is now lonely and numb. He says,and somehow a doghas taken itself & its tail considerably awayinto mountains or sea or sky, leaving behind: me, wag." (15-18) The betrayal that he has faced hasn't just made Henry sad and hopeless. It has caused the world itself to lose all meaning to him. Henry feels guilty because he has been conditioned to believe that life is a gift and we should never be bored of it. At the same time, though, his loneliness and isolation has made living seem like a boring, impossible chore."Dream Song 29" shows how deeply Henry's trauma has altered his reality. The poem begins by stating that no matter how much time he has, Henry will not be able to recover from what has happened to him. He is haunted by another thing that follows him around too. But he is unable to see what it is exactly is affecting him, so he has no control over it.Henry then states that he didn't kill anyone, although he thought that he did. He can imagine hacking a woman up and hiding her body for someone to find. He almost wants the body to be found, perhaps so that he can make that connection with another human. Regardless, he realizes in the morning that he didn't murder anyone:He knows: he went over everyone, & nobody's missing.Often he reckons, in the dawn, them up.Nobody is ever missing." (16-18)His trauma affects him so badly that he isn't sure of the world around him or even of his own actions. He thinks he might be capable of murder and might enjoy it like a game. But he often wakes up and realizes that the violence is a figment of his imagination.Fig. 3 - The speaker has to remind himself that no one is missing to be sure that he didn't kill anyone.All of these poems work in tandem to develop Henry's character. He is often considered an anti-hero because he is selfish, manic, and volatile. The more we examine Henry's character, though, the more it becomes apparent that he is merely attempting to survive his trauma. His distance from the world, others, and himself is a coping mechanism that he uses to protect himself from further pain. The numbness and altered reality that Henry experiences is due to his unresolved trauma. This doesn't mean that Henry is unproblematic or completely innocent, but it does reveal the deep impact that his trauma and subsequent depression has had on all areas of his life.Anti-hero: a main character/protagonist who lacks the qualities (such as morality and honor) that are typically associated with a hero.The main themes in 77 Dream Songs Collection are depression, loneliness, and self-destruction.Throughout the entire collection, Henry struggles with feelings of depression. He becomes numb to the world and the people around him as he swims in his own grief. Consider this passage from "Dream Song 29":There sat down, once, a thing on Henry's heartsó heavy, if he had a hundred years& more, & weeping, sleepless, in all them timeHenry could not make good." (1-4)His depression makes him feel completely helpless and out of control, which in turn makes him lash out. In between the poems where Henry is subdued and just wants to hide, are instances of violence and manic energy. His ability to connect with others is hampered by the overwhelming feeling of depression.Because his depression makes him feel alone and takes control of his entire life, Henry suffers from extreme loneliness. This is directly shown in "Dream Song 40" when Henry says,I'm scared a lonely. Never see my son,easy be not to see anyone," (1-2) Not only does Henry isolate himself physically, but when he does encounter other people he isolates himself emotionally as well. This is apparent in "Dream Song 4," when he craves the woman physically but has no interest in her emotionally. His depression has isolated him from others and led to physical and emotional loneliness.Because Henry feels numb to the world and the people around him, he becomes quite self-destructive. Firstly, he stays in a friendship with a man who wants to see him fail simply because he has no one else. He allows the toxic relationship with the man who calls him Mr. Bones to continue. He also actively contemplates suicide when his depression is at its peak. In "Dream Song 40," he says,Got a little poison, got a little gun" (5).Although Henry does not commit suicide, he considers the idea. He also is self-destructive in many of his social interactions, where he positions himself as the villain.Fig. 4 - Henry displays his self-destructive tendencies when he carries poison with him.Berryman was very adamant that 77 Dream Songs was not autobiographical. In several interviews, lectures, and introductions he stated that he and Henry were not the same person. In fact, according to the Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry,When the first volume, 77 Dream Songs, was misinterpreted as simple autobiography, Berryman wrote in a prefatory note to the sequel, 'The poem then, whatever its cast of characters, is essentially about an imaginary character (not the poet, not me) named Henry, a white American in early middle age sometimes in blackface, who has suffered an irreversible loss and talks about himself sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, sometimes even in the second; he has a friend, never named, who addresses him as Mr Bones and variants thereof."1Although not a purely autobiographical collection, 77 Dream Songs did help Berryman work through aspects of his own depression and childhood trauma. He reflects on his father's suicide and the betrayal that he felt growing up without a father. He also discusses drinking, feelings of guilt, and the potential for violence.Because 77 Dream Songs was influenced in part by Berryman's own trauma and childhood experiences, he is often grouped with the Confessional poets. Berryman resented that association, though he was friends with famous Confessional poets like Robert Lowell. Other confessional poets include Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton.Confessional poetry is influenced by the poet's own trauma and experiences. Confessional poets use writing as an outlet to work through their feelings and mental health issues, which are often dramatized in poetry for the effect. The work often closely mirrors the poet's life and personal experiences. Although readers get a glimpse into the author's psyche, it is important to note that the speaker and the poet are not one in the same.On more than a personal level, 77 Dream Songs depicts how depression and other mental illnesses can impact every aspect of a person's life. More than just a feeling of sadness, it can make those who suffer from it feel numb, hostile, isolated, and even hopeless. The dream-like qualities contribute to the eerie feeling of the poem, where things aren't quite right. 77 Dream Songs presents a more extreme case of depression, but it depicts the reality of the illness without romanticizing it.77 Dream Songs was written by John Berryman. The antagonist of the collection, Henry, is Berryman's literary alter-ego, but he and Berryman are not the same person. 77 Dream Songs is set in a dream world, where Henry has to navigate his past trauma and his suffocating depression. The main themes are depression, loneliness, and self-destruction.Berryman used this collection to work through his own struggles with his trauma and depression. It also shows that depression is more than just being sad, it affects every aspect of Henry's life and even alters his reality. Who is Henry in John Berryman poems? Henry is Berryman's literary alter ego. He is the narrator and anti-hero in 77 Dream Songs. What is the main theme in 77 Dream Songs? One of the main themes in 77 Dream Songs is depression. Who wrote 77 Dream Songs? 77 Dream Songs was written by John Berryman. When were 77 Dream Songs written? The collection was published in 1964. What genre is 77 Dream Songs? 77 Dream Songs is in the genre of poetry and can be more specifically listed as lyric poetry. Save Article At StudySmarter, we have created a learning platform that serves millions of students. Meet the people who work hard to deliver fact based content as well as making sure it is verified. Content Creation Process: Lily Hulatt is a Digital Content Specialist with over three years of experience in content strategy and curriculum design. She gained her PhD in English Literature from Durham University in 2022, taught in Durham University’s English Studies Department, and has contributed to a number of publications. Lily specialises in English Literature, English Language, History, and Philosophy. Get to know Lily Content Quality Monitored by: Gabriel Freitas is an AI Engineer with a solid experience in software development, machine learning algorithms, and generative AI, including large language models’ (LLMs) applications. Graduated in Electrical Engineering at the University of São Paulo, he is currently pursuing an MSc in Computer Engineering at the University of Campinas, specializing in mach

hear discourse so plainly, 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." 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." 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— Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore 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 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; 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! Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer Swung by Seraphim 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 from thy memories of Lenore; Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!" Quoth the Raven "Nevermore." "Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!— Whether Tempter 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?—tell me—tell me, I implore!" 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, It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore— 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! 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 bust of Pallas just above my chamber door; 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! What Is "The Raven" About? "The Raven" is a poem about a man who is heartbroken over the recent death of his beloved Lenore. As he passes a lonely December night in his room, a raven taps repeatedly on the door and then the window. The man first thinks the noise is caused by a late night visitor come to disturb him, and he is surprised to find the raven when he opens the window shutter. After being let in, the raven flies to and lands on a bust of Pallas (an ancient Greek goddess of wisdom). The man is amused by how serious the raven looks, and he begins talking to the raven; however, the bird can only reply by croaking "nevermore." The man reflects aloud that the bird will leave him soon as all the people he cared about have left him. When the raven replies "nevermore," the man takes it as the bird agreeing with him, although it's unclear if the raven actually understands what the man is saying or is just speaking the one word it knows. As the man continues to converse with the bird, he slowly loses his grip on reality. He moves his chair directly in front of the raven and asks it despairing questions, including whether he and Lenore will be reunited in heaven. Now, instead of being merely amused by the bird, he takes the raven's repeated "nevermore" response as a sign that all his dark thoughts are true. He eventually grows angry and shrieks at the raven, calling it a devil and a thing of evil. The poem ends with the raven still sitting on the bust of Pallas and the narrator, seemingly defeated by his grief and madness, declaring that his soul shall be lifted "nevermore." Background on "The Raven" Edgar Allan Poe wrote "The Raven" during a difficult period in his life. His wife, Virginia, was suffering from tuberculosis, Poe was struggling to make money as an unknown writer, and he began drinking heavily and picking fights with coworkers and other writers. It's easy to see how he could have conjured the dark and melancholy mood of "The Raven." It's not known how long Poe spent writing "The Raven," (guesses range from anywhere to a single day to over a decade) but it's thought most likely that he wrote the poem in the summer of 1844. In his essay, "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe stated that he chose to focus the poem on the death of a beautiful woman because it is "unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world." He hoped "The Raven" would make him famous, and, in the same essay, stated that he purposely wrote the poem to appeal to both "the popular and the critical taste." "The Raven" was published in the newspaper The New York Evening Mirror on January 29, 1845 (depending on the source, Poe was paid either $9 or $15 for it). "The Raven" brought Poe instant fame, although not the financial security he was looking for. Critical reception was mixed, with some famous writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Butler Yeats expressing their dislike for the poem. Despite those initial mixed reviews, The Raven poem has continued its popularity and is now one of the most well-known poems in the world. Countless parodies have been written, and the poem has been referenced in everything from The Simpsons to the NFL team the Baltimore Ravens (their mascot is even named "Poe"). Major Themes in "The Raven" From The Raven summary, we know it's definitely a melancholy poem, and most of its themes revolve around grim topics. Here are three of the most important themes. Theme 1: Grief Grief is the overwhelming emotion in "The Raven," and the narrator is absolutely consumed by his grief for his lost love, Lenore. At the beginning of the poem, he tries to distract himself from his sadness by reading a "volume of forgotten lore", but when the raven arrives, he immediately begins peppering it with questions about Lenore and becomes further lost in his grief at the raven's response of "nevermore." By the end of the poem, the narrator is seemingly broken, stating that his soul will never again be "lifted" due to his sadness. Poe stated that the raven itself was a symbol of grief, specifically, that it represented "mournful and never-ending remembrance." He purposely chose a raven over a parrot (a bird species better known for its ability to speak) because he thought a raven suited the dark tone of the poem better. Edgar Allan Poe had experienced a great deal of grief by the time he wrote "The Raven," and he had seen people close to him leave, fall gravely ill, or die. He would have been well aware of the consuming power that grief can have and how it has the ability to blot everything else out. Theme 2: Devotion It's the narrator's deep love for Lenore that causes him such grief, and later rage and madness. Even though Lenore has died, the narrator still loves her and appears unable to think of anything but her. In the poem, he speaks of Lenore in superlatives, calling her "sainted" and "radiant." In his mind, she is completely perfect, practically a saint. His love for this woman who is no longer here distracts him from everything in his current life. With this theme, Poe is showing the power of love and how it can continue to be powerful even after death. Theme 3: Rationality vs Irrationality At the beginning of the poem, the narrator is rational enough to understand that Lenore is dead and he will not see her again. When the raven first begins repeating "nevermore," he realizes that the answer is the bird's "only stock and store," and he won't get another response no matter what he asks. He seems to even find the bird vaguely amusing. However, as the poem continues, the narrator's irrationality increases as he asks the raven questions it couldn't possibly know and takes its repeated response of "nevermore" to be a truthful and logical answer. He then descends further into madness, cursing the bird as a "devil" and "thing of evil" and thinking he feels angels surrounding him before sinking into his grief. He has clearly come undone by the end of the poem. In "The Raven," Poe wanted to show the fine line between rational thought and madness and how strong emotions, such as grief, can push a person into irrationality, even during mundane interactions like the one the narrator had with the raven. The 7 Key Poetic Devices "The Raven" Uses Edgar Allan Poe makes use of many poetic devices in "The Raven" to create a memorable and moving piece of writing. Below we discuss seven of the most important of these devices and how they contribute to the poem. Alliteration Alliteration is the repetition of a sound or letter at the beginning of multiple words in a work, and it's perhaps the most obvious poetic device in "The Raven." The poem is full of alliteration, such as the phrases "weak and weary," "nearly napping," and "followed fast and followed faster." This poetic device helps give the poem its famous musicality and is one of the reasons people love to recite it. Allusion An allusion is an indirect reference to something, and Poe makes multiple allusions in "The Raven." Some key ones include: The bust of Pallas the raven sits on refers to Pallas Athena, the ancient Greek goddess of wisdom. Nepenthe is a drug mentioned in Homer's ancient epic The Odyssey, and it is purported to erase memories. The Balm of Gilead is a reference to a healing cream mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah in the Bible. Aidenn refers to the Garden of Eden, although the narrator likely uses it to mean "heaven" in general, as he wants to know if that's where he and Lenore will reunite. Ravens themselves are mentioned in many stories, including Norse mythology and Ovid's epic poem Metamorphoses. Many readers would be well-versed in the books and stories alluded to in the poem, and they would have understood the references without Poe having to explicitly explain where each was derived from. Doing so would have broken the tension and mood of the poem, so Poe is able to simply allude to them. Assonance Similar to alliteration, assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in one or more words found close together. It serves the same purpose as alliteration and appears beginning in the first line of the poem, where the long "e" sound is repeated in the words "dreary," "weak," and "weary." Meter The majority of "The Raven" follows trochaic octameter, which is when there are eight trochaic feet per line, and each foot has one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable. However, Poe actually used several types of meter, and he is said to have based both the meter and rhyming pattern of "The Raven" off Elizabeth Barrett's poem " Lady Geraldine's Courtship." Meter is very prominent in "The Raven," and, along with other poetic devices, helps make it such a popular poem to recite. Repetition Many words are repeated in "The Raven" the most famous being the word "nevermore" repeated by the bird himself throughout the poem. Other commonly repeated words and phrases in the poem include "Lenore," "chamber door" and "nothing more." These all rhyme with "nevermore" and add to the feeling of despondency in the poem by emphasizing the raven's bleak answer to every question. Rhyme The rhyming pattern in "The Raven" follows the pattern ABCBBB. The "B" lines all rhyme with "nevermore" and place additional emphasis on the final syllable of the line. There is also quite a bit of internal rhyme within the poem, such as the line "But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token," where "unbroken" rhymes with "token." Internal rhyming occurs in the first line of each stanza. It also occurs in the third line and part of the fourth line of each stanza. In the example "Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!/Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!" "token" and "spoken" in the third line of the stanza rhyme with "unbroken" in the fourth line of the stanza. Onomatopoeia Onomatopoeia is when the name of a word is associated with the sound it makes, and it occurs throughout "The Raven," such as with the words "rapping," "tapping," "shrieked," and "whispered." It all helps add to the atmospheric quality of the poem and makes readers feel as though they are really in the room with the narrator and the raven. What's Next? "Ozymandias" by Percy Shelley is another famous and often-studied poem. Learn all about this poem and its famous line "look on my works, ye mighty, and despair" in our complete guide to Ozymandias. There are many more poetic devices than those included in "The Raven." Read our guide on the 20 poetic devices you need to know so you can become an expert. Taking AP Literature? We've got you covered! In our expert guide to the AP Literature exam, we've compiled all the information you need to know about the test and how to study for it to get a top score. The unnamed narrator is alone in his house on a cold December evening, trying to read. As he is about to fall asleep, he hears a quiet knock at his door, but decides to ignore it. He says that he has been reading in the hopes of relieving his sorrow over Lenore, his beloved, who has passed away. Though he tries to convince himself that nothing is there, his curiosity and fear overwhelm him. He eventually opens his door, speaking “Lenore?” into the darkness. When he hears tapping at his window, he opens that, too, and a Raven flies inside his room, landing on a bust of Pallas. The narrator jokingly asks the Raven’s name, and is surprised to hear it respond “Nevermore.” He mutters to himself that the Raven will probably leave him just as his friends and loved ones did, to which the Raven responds once more “Nevermore.” The narrator then seats himself directly in front of the bird, trying to understand what it means by “Nevermore.” Suddenly, the narrator perceives that angels sent by God have caused the air to become dense and perfumed. Anxious, he asks the Raven if the angels are a sign that heaven will relieve him of his sorrows, to which the bird says, again, “Nevermore.” With the same response, the bird rejects his hope that he might see Lenore again in heaven, as well as his impassioned request for the bird to leave him alone. Finally, the narrator tells us that the Raven has continued to sit atop his chamber door above the bust of Pallas, and that he will live forever in its shadow. Further study The unnamed speaker sits in his room on a gloomy December night, reading old, obscure books. He sorely misses his love, Lenore, who presumably died recently, and hopes that reading will distract him from the loss. He's almost asleep when he suddenly hears someone or something knocking on the door. He immediately feels uneasy but convinces himself that it's probably just a visitor. "'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door - Only this and nothing more." He calls out, apologizing for the late response. Nevertheless, when he opens the door, no one is there. He whispers, "Lenore," into the darkness outside, but hears only the echo of his words. Mysteriously, the knocking continued but this time the speaker heard it coming from the window. He assumes it is the wind but still feels uncomfortable. He opens the window shutters and a raven swoops in, landing on a bust of the Greek goddess Athena Pallas above the chamber door. The sight of the bird gives the speaker a moment of relief. "Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling, By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore," He jokingly asks what the bird's name is. To his utter shock, the raven cried, "Nevermore." The speaker is stunned and not sure what the ravens mean. He regains his serenity and whispers to himself that the bird will fly away soon. "Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly, Though its answer little meaning - little relevancy bore;" The raven replies again, "Nevermore!" Still trying to comfort himself, the speaker theorizes that the bird must have had an owner who taught it to say that one hopeless word. Interested, the speaker shifts his chair in front of the raven. He slumps in his chair, thinking about the raven for a few moments. He thinks about how Lenore will never sit in this chair again. He admonishes himself - God has given him this one respite from his guilt, and he still thinks of Lenore. He tells himself to forget Lenore. "Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee - by these angels he hath sent thee Respite - respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore; Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!" In response, the raven again says, "Nevermore." Now, the speaker starts talking to the bird, calling it "evil" and a "prophet". He questions if he will ever find solace. Raven says: "Nevermore." He asks if he will hold Lenore when he gets to heaven. The raven replies: "Nevermore." Furious, the speaker demands the raven to leave him alone. He accuses the raven of being a liar and screams for him to get out. Without moving, the bird recites its only refrain - "Nevermore." The speaker concludes that the raven still sits on the bust of Athena Pallas, casting a shadow over his soul that will remain forever. "And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door; 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!" Further study First published: 1845, in The Raven and Other PoemsType of poem: BalladThe Poem“The Raven” is a ballad of eighteen six-line stanzas with decidedly emphatic meter and rhymes. The ballad is a nightmarish narrative of a young man who, bereaved by the death of the woman he loved, compulsively constructs self-destructive meaning around a raven’s repetition of the word “Nevermore,” until he finally despairs of being reunited with his beloved Lenore in another world.Narrated from the first-person point of view, the poem conveys, with dramatic immediacy, the speaker’s shift from weary, sorrowful composure to a state of nervous collapse as he recounts his strange experience with the mysterious ebony bird. The first seven stanzas establish the setting and the narrator’s melancholic, impressionable state of mind. Weak and worn out with grief, the speaker had sought distraction from his sorrow by reading curiously esoteric books. Awakened at midnight by a sound outside his chamber, he opens the door, expecting a visitor; he finds only darkness. Apprehensive, he whispers the name Lenore and closes the door. When the tapping persists, he opens a window, admitting a raven that perches upon a bust of Pallas (Athena).In stanzas 8 to 11, the narrator, beguiled by the ludicrous image of the black bird in his room, playfully asks the raven its name, as if to reassure himself that it portends nothing ominous. He is startled, however, to hear the raven respond, saying, “Nevermore.” Although the word apparently has little relevance to any discoverable meaning, the narrator is sobered by the bird’s forlorn utterance. He assumes that the raven’s owner, having suffered unendurable disasters, taught the bird to imitate human speech in order to utter the one word most expressive of the owner’s sense of hopelessness.In stanzas 12 and 13, the narrator settles himself on a velvet cushion in front of the bird and whimsically ponders what the raven meant by repeating a word he inevitably associated with thoughts of the departed Lenore. At this point, the grieving lover, in anticipation of the raven’s maddening repetition of “Nevermore,” begins masochistically to frame increasingly painful questions.Imagining a perfumed presence in the room, the narrator, in a state of growing agitation, asks the raven whether God had mercifully sent him to induce in the poet forgetfulness of the lost Lenore; the inevitable response causes the narrator to plead with the raven—now addressed as a prophet of evil sent by the “Temptor”—to tell him whether there is any healing in heaven for his grief. The raven’s predictable answer provokes the grieving lover, now almost in a state of maddened frenzy, to ask bluntly whether his soul would ever be reunited with Lenore in heaven. Receiving the horrific “Nevermore” in reply to his ultimate question, the distraught narrator demands that the raven, whether actual bird or fiend, leave his chambers and quit torturing his heart; the raven’s unendurable answer drives the bereaved lover into a state of maddened despair. The raven becomes a permanent fixture in the room, a symbolic presence presiding over the narrator’s self-inflicted mental and spiritual collapse.Forms and Devices“The Raven” is Edgar Allan Poe’s most famous poem, not only because of its immediate and continued popularity but also because Poe wrote “The Philosophy of Composition,” an essay reconstructing the step-by-step process of how he composed the poem as if it were a precise mathematical problem. Discounting the role of serendipity, romantic inspiration, or intuition, Poe accounted for every detail as the result of calculated effect. Although the essay may be a tour de force, informed readers of the poem—from the nineteenth century French poets Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Paul Valéry to such twentieth century poets as Allen Tate and T. S. Eliot—have recognized the value of Poe’s essay in understanding the poem’s forms and poetic devices.Poe’s analysis of the structure and texture of “The Raven” is too detailed to consider at length (and some of it must be taken with several grains of salt, allowing for considerable exaggeration on Poe’s part); however, his essay sheds light on three important aspects implicit in the poem’s form: its conception as a theatrical performance; the narrator’s anguished involvement in making meaning by obsessively asking increasingly self-lacerating questions; and the function of the maddening, incantatory rhythm and rhymes that help cast a mind-paralyzing spell over both the declaiming narrator and the reader.Although the principles of brevity and unity of impression or effect that inform the poem rest on Poe’s aesthetic theories, derived from the facultative psychology of his time (the world of mind separated into faculties of intellect, taste, and the moral sense with crucial implications for the form and substance of poetry and romance), it is more helpful to see the contribution of this severe economy of means to the histrionic qualities of the poem. The persona narrates the poem as a kind of dramatic monologue, carefully arranging the scene of his chamber and the stage properties for maximum theatrical effect: the play of light and shadow from the hearth, the esoteric volumes, the silken, purple curtains, the door and window opening onto a tempestuous night offstage. There is also the dramatic juxtaposition of the black talking bird perched on the white bust of Pallas over the chamber door, the velvet cushion on which the narrator sits facing the raven, and the lamplight throwing shadows over the narrator’s soul “floating on the floor,” at the frenzied climax of the poem. Even the pivotal refrain that keynotes the poem’s structure contributes to the artistic effect “in the theatrical sense.”The most original device of the poem is the way the narrator unconsciously arranges his questions. He begins nonchalantly with a commonplace question; under the hypnotic influence of the raven’s cacophonous, melancholic repetition of “Nevermore,” and driven by both the human thirst for self-torture and a superstitious mind, the bereaved lover luxuriates in sorrow by asking more distressful questions until the inexorable answer becomes intolerable, and he melodramatically sinks into maddened despair.The nightmarish effect of the poem is reinforced by the relentless trochaic rhythm and the arrangement of the ballad stanzas into five lines of octameter followed by a refrain in tetrameter. This combination, along with emphatic alliteration, allows for strong internal and end rhymes, resulting in a mesmerizing syncopation of redundancies as inescapable as the sonorous refrain. This incantatory repetition creates an aural quality that helps force a collaboration between the poem and the reader, a maddening regularity aptly conveying the speaker’s disintegrating reason, while contributing to the theatrical effect of the poem as histrionic performance.BibliographyBurluck, Michael L. Grim Phantasms: Fear in Poe’s Short Fiction. New York: Garland, 1993.Hoffman, Daniel. Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998.Hutchisson, James M. Poe. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.Irwin, John T. The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytical Detective Story. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.Kennedy, J. Gerald. A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.May, Charles E. Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction. Boston: Twayne, 1991.Peeples, Scott. Edgar Allan Poe Revisited. New York: Twayne, 1998.Quinn, Arthur Hobson. Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.Silverman, Kenneth. Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.Sova, Dawn B. Edgar Allan Poe, A to Z. New York: Facts On File, 2001.Whalen, Terence. Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999. I’m looking outside at the bleak November weather while writing this “The Raven” summary. Despite my modern electric lighting, it’s easy to feel spooked at this time of year. Dusk comes early and the wind blows the rain sideways, hard enough to rap on my window. I guess some things haven’t changed much since Edgar Allen Poe’s time. Perhaps everyone can identify with the feelings his most popular poem provokes—fear, grief, and something less tangible, lurking in the dark. A talking bird, perhaps? Before jumping to any conclusions, I suggest we take a closer look at what went into the making of the poem. Then we’ll make a “The Raven” summary and pick apart the various “The Raven” meanings. “The Raven” Summary: Historical and Biographical Context The 19th-century American Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) wrote poems, short stories, and essays. Perhaps you know him already from some of his famous Gothic-inspired stories. These include “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Fall of the House of Usher.” Then there’s his often-quoted poem “Annabel Lee,” which inspired Nabokov when writing Lolita. Poe himself drew poetic inspiration from earlier English romantics, including Lord Byron, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. His detective stories, including “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” inspired Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes series. As for Poe’s penchant for gloomy atmospheres and horrific revelations, he took his cues from leading Gothic novelist Ann Radcliff. Despite this breadth of writing, Poe maintained that literature needn’t have a function beyond acting as a work of art. This theory, called “art for art’s sake,” was shared by some of Poe’s contemporaries, including Oscar Wilde. Poe’s aim with poetry involved invoking sadness, strangeness, and loss, which in turn would elicit a sense of beauty. This technique applied in particular to “The Raven,” which Poe wrote around 1845. Here, he wished to explore the loss of beauty and the impossibility of regaining it. He did so by incarnating beauty in a deceased love, which he called “the most poetical topic in the world.” This trope of a beloved’s untimely death dates back to Petrarch, who dedicated sonnets to his lost love, Laura. Dante followed, chasing his sweetheart Beatrice through hell, purgatory, and heaven. By maintaining this tradition, Poe strategically positioned himself in the same lauded literary canon. “The Raven” Summary: Reception While critics received “The Raven” with mixed opinions, the public responded favorably. This poem would become Poe’s most popular in his lifetime. It granted him at least some of the recognition he wished to obtain in his writing career. Later, Charles Baudelaire would translate “The Raven” into French. Thus, the poem went on to inspire the French Symbolists, including Arthur Rimbaud. Even in the 20th and 21st centuries, “The Raven” has continued to inspire artists in high and popular culture. Perhaps you’ve heard of the British rock band The Alan Parsons Project. Their album “Tales of Mystery and Imagination, is entirely based on Poe’s writing, and contains a song called “The Raven.” Then there are the recent Poe-inspired Netflix adaptations, and even the football team, the Baltimore Ravens. Yet to understand what makes “The Raven” such a timeless and adaptable piece of literature, we must return to the source. So, without further ado, the poem, if you please. “The Raven” Poem 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 some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door. “‘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 From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore— For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore— Nameless here for evermore. The Raven Summary & Meaning (Continued) And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before; 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;— This it is and nothing more.” Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer, “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. 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!”— 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 thereat is, and this mystery explore— Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;— ‘Tis the wind and nothing more!” The Raven Summary & Meaning (Continued) 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; Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he; But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door— Perched upon a bust of Pallas 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, “Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven, Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore— Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!” Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.” Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly, 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.” 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.” Then the bird said “Nevermore.” The Raven Summary & Meaning (Continued) 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— 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 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; 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! Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer Swung by Seraphim 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 from thy memories of Lenore; Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!” Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.” “Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!— Whether Tempter 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?—tell me—tell me, I implore!” Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.” The Raven Summary & Meaning (Continued) “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, It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore— 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! 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 bust of Pallas just above my chamber door; 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! “The Raven” Summary “The Raven” begins with an unnamed narrator falling asleep while trying to lose himself in his books on a cold, dreary December night. He hopes these books will provide a distraction from his grief for Lenore. Yet the real distraction comes in the shape of a talking raven. He first hears the raven tapping at his door. Upon opening the door, the narrator finds nothing but darkness, and his own voice, echoing “Lenore.” Already, the narrator seems to be looking for some mystic sign of his lost love. When the tapping continues, the narrator next opens the window. In steps a raven. Without pause, it enters and perches above the doorframe, on the bust of a Greek god. The corvid squawks only one word, “nevermore,” in response (or so it seems) to anything and everything the narrator says. What follows is fanciful, amusing, and melancholic, all at once. The narrator, supposing the raven can only repeat a word he once heard, dismisses the meaning behind “nevermore.” Despite this rationale, he pulls up a chair, and cannot help but ask the raven questions. Distraught from Lenore’s recent death, the narrator seeks meaning in the raven’s unchanging responses. When he asks if angels have sent the bird to provide relief from his mourning, the raven answers “Nevermore.” Soon the narrator begins to suspect the bird has not come from heaven, but somewhere more devilish. Still, he continues to ask if he may hope to heal. The raven answers “Nevermore.” The narrator, becoming desperate, asks the raven if he will meet Lenore in Eden, meaning heaven. “Nevermore,” the raven responds. Enraged, the narrator asks the raven to leave. Naturally, the bird answers “Nevermore.” The poem ends with the raven perched above the narrator, whose soul is crushed. “The Raven” Meaning: Obscure Words and Allusions To synthesize the above “The Raven” summary, I needed to look into a few key allusions and some difficult vocabulary. Many of Poe’s allusions refer to ancient texts, especially the Bible and classic Greco-Roman literature. Poe even hints he’ll be drawing on “many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore” in the first stanza. Biblical allusions include the “Tempter” (the devil), heaven, angels, Seraphim, and Aidenn (Eden). Readers will also notice the “balm in Gilead” referring to a biblical cure-all. As for Greek allusions, one involves “a bust of Pallas,” meaning the goddess Athena, who represents wisdom. Another is “nepenthe,” a plant-based narcotic mentioned in Homer’s The Odyssey, thought to erase memory. Finally, the crow itself carries certain ancient connotations. In Metamorphoses, Ovid writes that the “croaking raven” once had “silver white plumage.” Yet, “Because of his ready speech, he, who was once snow white, was now white’s opposite.” Poe takes up this trope of the chatty raven, yet here the man, and not the raven, undergoes punishment. Because of the erudite vocabulary, readers may want to read “The Raven” with a dictionary. I’ll give you a head start. “Surcease” means a temporary halt or pause from something. In this case, it’s a pause from sorrow. The word “censer” refers to an incense holder. To “quaff” means to drink with enthusiasm. “Quoth,” means “said” or “spoke,” which our raven does often. “The Raven” Summary: Poetic Structures The structure of “The Raven” remains fairly uniform throughout. Eighteen six-line stanzas rely mainly on trochaic octameter. A trochaic foot involves one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable (essentially the opposite of an iambic foot). However, most lines actually end on a stressed syllable, giving the line 7.5 feet, or 15 syllables. (“Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”) Poe borrowed this meter from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poem “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship.” Rhyme also reinforces the structure of “The Raven.” Not only does the poem follow the ABCBBB rhyme pattern, but the B lines all rhyme with “nevermore.” (Forgotten lore, chamber door, upon the floor, Lenore…) The rhyme scheme makes the poem catchy, fun to read aloud, and ultimately memorable. It also evokes the sound of an echo, reinforcing the spookiness of the poem’s atmosphere and plot. Internal rhymes (such as “sorrow laden”/“sainted maiden”) further this effect and enhances a certain sense of inevitability. This inevitable feeling works to suggest an implicit message in the poem, that death is inescapable and unalterable. “The Raven” Summary: Poetic Devices Caesura crops up in “The Raven” when a pause breaks the natural momentum of a line. For example, we see it with “Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking.” Caesura gives the lines and stanzas a prose-like quality we’d find in stories with full sentences. It allows Poe to give himself fully to the act of storytelling, rather than leave us with a more abstract, opaque style of poetry, such as the work of poets like Emily Dickinson. “The Raven” makes use of other poetic devices as well. We find alliteration in lines like “Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.” Assonance appears in phrases like, “entreating entrance” and “Tempter/tempest.” Epistrophe, or the repetition of the same word at the end of multiple lines, is also present. Then there’s the repetition of whole lines or phrases. My favorite appears in the third stanza, and works on a psychological level. “I stood repeating/“‘Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—/Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—.” In this repetition, we find a perfect example of form fitting function. Anyone who’s tried to reassure themself that nothing is wrong will recognize the inclination to repeat this reassurance. It’s soothing. Apart from caesura, all of these poetic devices double down on similarities and sameness. They match the repetitive actions of the raven, his rapping and tapping, and his only utterance, “Nevermore.” These various reoccurrences create a haunting, even fateful feeling throughout the poem. Despite the strangeness of a talking raven, it seems as if everything had to happen this way. The reader is therefore hardly shocked when the poem ends with the narrator’s own sense of doom. “The Raven” Meaning: Themes We cannot avoid discussing themes of death and grief when looking for “The Raven” meanings. Death appears in the absence of Lenore and in the hope of a reunion in some afterlife. Grief, meanwhile, appears throughout the poem. We might go so far as to say that the mourning narrator embodies grief. Thus, “The Raven” juxtaposes not life and death, but grief and death. It asks the difficult question of how to carry on after losing someone permanently. Some critics will say that Poe warns readers against the destructive nature of grief. (Don’t forget that the poem ends with the narrator’s soul lying on the floor!) The poem could be read as a cautionary tale: don’t go looking for signs and symbols from someone you’ve lost. Leave the dead alone. And yet, if we glance at other literature, we’ll notice a pattern. Seeking messages from lost loved ones in the form of a bird is surprisingly commonplace. Perhaps it’s a universal human habit. The ancient Greeks took messages from birds and read the future that way. In contemporary literature, too, birds often appear in moments when someone seeks a message from the dead. (For a few examples, check out Evie Wyld’s The Bass Rock and Max Porter’s Grief Is the Thing With Feathers.) Poe, writing in a time when spiritual seances were gaining traction, understood that grief is more bearable when shared. Grief can contain hope. So while readers of “The Raven” may delight in its gloom, others who’ve felt grief may find solace in recognizing and sharing in the narrator’s sorrow. What’s next? We hope you enjoyed this article on “Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Raven”: Summary & Meaning.” For helpful guides to reading comprehension, essay writing skills, and more, visit our page on High School Success. You’ll find links to other literary analyses, such as The Lottery by Shirley Jackson, “We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks and “Because I could not stop for Death” by Emily Dickinson. Table of Contents What is The Raven about? This poem is a haunting exploration of grief and loss. It tells of a man who mourns his lost love, Lenore. One night, a raven visits him, repeating the word “Nevermore.” This interaction leads the man into despair and madness as he grapples with the permanence of loss. Book Details Title: The Raven Author: Edgar Allan Poe Illustrator: Gustave Doré Published: January 29, 1845 Pages