“The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe

Literary Analysis: Single Effect and Style

Edgar Allan Poe believed that a short story should be constructed to achieve a “certain unique or single effect.” In “The Fall of the House of Usher,” every aspect of the author’s style contributes to and heightens the single effect. These elements of style include choice of words, length of sentences, type and structure of sentences, rhythm, and literary devices.

DIRECTIONS: Read this passage from “The Fall of the House of Usher.” Explain how each element of style contributes to the story’s single effect.

It was, especially, upon retiring to bed late in the night of the seventh or eighth day after the placing of the lady Madeline within the donjon, that I experienced the full power of such feelings. Sleep came not near my couch—while the hours waned and waned away. I struggled to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over me. I endeavored to believe that much, if not all of what I felt, was due to the bewildering influence of the gloomy furniture of the room—of the dark and tattered draperies, which, tortured into motion by the breath of a rising tempest, swayed fitfully to and fro upon the walls, and rustled uneasily about the decorations of the bed.

1. Does the author choose simple and direct words or words that are more complex and formal? How does this contribute to the story’s single effect?

2. List at least three examples of word choices that help contribute to the story’s single effect.

3. How does sentence length and structure contribute to the story’s single effect?

4. List at least two examples of how the author creates an internal rhythm by repeating words or ideas from sentence to sentence. How does this contribute to the single effect?

5. Does the author use vivid imagery or strong similes, metaphors, or other literary devices? How does this contribute to the story’s single effect?
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Build Vocabulary

Spelling Strategy  The sound of sh is sometimes spelled ci, as in specious, or ti, as in sentience.

Using the Root -voc-

A. DIRECTIONS: The root -voc- comes from the Latin vox, meaning “voice.” On the lines provided, explain how the root -voc- influences the meaning of each of the italicized words.

1. The environmental board in our town advocates passage of a strong law against dumping waste in Lake Jasper.

2. Studying the works of Poe will probably improve your vocabulary.

3. The cottage was evocative of happy childhood memories.

Using the Word Bank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>importunate</th>
<th>appellation</th>
<th>sentence</th>
<th>munificent</th>
<th>specious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>obeisance</td>
<td>equivocal</td>
<td>anomalous</td>
<td>craven</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

B. DIRECTIONS: For each item, write on the line the letter of the pair of words that expresses a relationship most like the pair in capital letters.

____ 1. JESSICA : APPELLATION ::
   a. light : sun   b. magenta : color   c. government : nation   d. mammal : horse

____ 2. FALSE : SPECIOUS ::
   a. beautiful : ugly   b. violent : wicked   c. plentiful : abundant   d. fat : hungry

____ 3. NORMAL : ANOMALOUS ::
   a. valuable : worthless   b. blue : color   c. sleepy : tired   d. loving : living

____ 4. EQUIVOCAL : SURE ::
   a. physician : disease   b. vocal : talkative   c. vague : clear   d. disappear : vanish

____ 5. SENTIENCE : FEELING ::
   a. capable : skill   b. visible : darkness   c. worth : value   d. sentence : verb

____ 6. BENEFACTOR : MUNIFICENT ::
   a. donor : charity   b. philanthropist : generous   c. giver : taker   d. charitable : kind

____ 7. IMPORTUNATE : INSIST ::
   a. unlucky : luck   b. proportionate : equal   c. create : thought   d. talkative : chat

____ 8. HERO : CRAVEN ::
   a. villain : evil   b. flatterer : complimentary   c. diplomat : tactless   d. raven : black

____ 9. BOW : OBEISANCE ::
   a. salute : hand   b. smile : happiness   c. frown : joy   d. yawn : silence
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Reading Strategy: Break Down Long Sentences

When an author writes a long, complicated sentence, you can clarify the meaning by breaking it down into its logical parts. Look especially for the subject and predicate at its core. After you have identified them, state the core in your own words.

Poe’s sentence: A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breath of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely molded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than weiblike softness and tenuity—these features, with an inordinate expansion above the region of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten.

Core sentence: These features made up a countenance not easily forgotten.

Own words: He had a memorable face.

Directions: Underline the core of the following sentences from “The Fall of the House of Usher.” Then restate the core in your own words.

1. During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of that year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.

2. I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled luster by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodeled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree stems, and the vacant and eyelike windows.

3. He admitted, however, although with hesitation, that much of the peculiar gloom which thus afflicted him could be traced to a more natural and far more palpable origin—to the severe and long-continued illness—indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution of a tenderly beloved sister, his sole companion for long years, his last and only relative on earth.

4. Our books—the books which, for years, had formed no small portion of the mental existence of the invalid—were, as might be supposed, in strict keeping with this character of phantasm.

5. Having deposited our mournful burden upon trestles within this region of horror, we partially turned aside the yet unscrewed lid of the coffin, and looked upon the face of the tenant.

6. No sooner had these syllables passed my lips, than—as if a shield of brass had indeed, at the moment, fallen heavily upon a floor of silver—I became aware of a distinct, hollow, metallic, and clangorous, yet apparently muffled, reverberation.
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**Literary Analysis: Single Effect**

Edgar Allan Poe said that a short story should be written to create a single effect. Every character, detail, and incident, from the first sentence on, should contribute to this effect. Certainly the effect of “The Fall of the House of Usher” is one of eerie terror, with mounting dread in every scene.

**DIRECTIONS:** Following are settings and characters described in “The Fall of the House of Usher.” On the lines below each setting or character, list three specific details about that setting or character that you feel contribute to the single effect.

1. **Setting:** The room in which Usher spends his days
   a. __________________________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________________________

2. **Setting:** Madeline’s tomb
   a. __________________________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________________________

3. **Setting:** The house at the end of the story
   a. __________________________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________________________

4. **Character:** Roderick Usher
   a. __________________________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________________________

5. **Character:** Madeline Usher
   a. __________________________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________________________
Media Connection: Film Versions of Edgar Allan Poe Stories


DIRECTIONS: Choose a scene from “The Fall of the House of Usher” or “The Raven” that you think would be especially suitable for a film or video interpretation. Recalling horror stories you have seen on television or at the movies, consider how you might film your scene. Focus on creating the right mood and effect. You may want to begin by looking at some suspense and horror videos of Poe’s work. Note the techniques used to create mood and effect. Think about how you will handle the narration in Poe’s stories. What will the setting be like? How will the characters look, dress, and move? Write a script for your scene that includes not only lines, but also descriptions of the setting, the characters and their actions, camera shots, and special visual and sound effects.

Plan your scene in the following space.

Chosen scene:

Notes on the setting:

Notes on the characters:

Ideas for special camera shots:

Ideas for visual and sound effects: