Edgar Allan Poe
Stories of Mystery and Suspense

In this reader you will find nine of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous stories of mystery and suspense. They range from Gothic historical stories such as *The Pit and the Pendulum*, through to detective fiction like *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and an early science fiction tale - *A Descent into the Maelström*. Ghostly mysteries such as *Ligeia* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* are also in the collection along with Poe's masterpiece study of madness *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

In this reader you will find:
- Information about Edgar Allan Poe’s life
- Focus On sections: Themes & Symbols, CLIL Meteorology, Great Detectives in Fiction
- Glossary of difficult words
- Comprehension and extension activities
- Final test
- First (FCE) Activities in British English

Tags
Classic literature, Mystery, Suspense
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Edgar Allan Poe

Stories of Mystery and Suspense

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS POE COLLECTION

The Tell-Tale Heart
A classic Poe study of madness and the macabre.

The Masque of the Red Death
The story of Prince Prospero’s attempts to escape the Red Death.

The Pit and the Pendulum
Set in a prison in Toledo, towards the end of the Spanish Inquisition.
The Premature Burial
A comic look at the fear of being buried alive.

A Descent into the Maelström
The story of three brothers caught in a storm at sea.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue
One of the first ever detective stories. Poe introduces C. Auguste Dupin.

The Stolen Letter
Another mystery solved by amateur detective, C. Auguste Dupin.

Ligeia
A man remarries after the death of his much-loved first wife.

The Fall of the House of Usher
The terrible end of the Usher family and their ancestral home.
Edgar Allan Poe’s Imagination

Edgar Allan Poe was one of America’s greatest writers of short stories. This volume contains nine of his stories which were written between 1838 and 1845 and (1)_______ published in magazines. Poe wrote many different types of fiction. In this collection you will find two of his detective stories – *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Stolen Letter* (originally called *The Purloined Letter*). The (2)_______ is considered one of the first detective stories, (3)_______ there are earlier examples in Chinese literature. Poe had a great influence on later writers (4)_______ as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. He was also interested in science fiction and *A Descent into the Maelström* is an (5)_______ of this type of writing. Poe is, however, probably most famous as a writer of dark short stories like *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the first story in this collection and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the (6)_______.

Poe also wrote poetry, but this is less popular today (7)_______ it was in the past. Poe’s career was tragically short, as he died at the age of 40.

1 A □ mainly  B □ readily  C □ certainly  D □ definitely
2 A □ better  B □ former  C □ after  D □ before
3 A □ although  B □ since  C □ then  D □ despite
4 A □ like  B □ good  C □ much  D □ such
5 A □ evidence  B □ exercise  C □ example  D □ entry
6 A □ latest  B □ last  C □ latter  D □ late
7 A □ compared  B □ of  C □ that  D □ than
2 Reporting Verbs. Solve these anagrams to find verbs we can use to report speech. Then fill the gaps to complete the sentences with the Past Simple of the verbs.

1 sak “How far exactly is it?” asked the child.
2 masrce “Help!” the old man _______.
3 lyper “Why?” she _______.
4 erwnas “Because it’s time,” the girl _______.
5 miexcal “You can’t do that!” the police officer _______.
6 ryc “Ouch! That hurt!” he _______.
7 ousth “Look out!” they _______. “There’s a car!”
8 eirwphs “Shh! They’ll hear us,” the small boy _______.

3 The first story is called The Tell-Tale Heart. Read this short introduction. Tick the words you expect to read in the text.

*The Tell-Tale Heart* is really a study of madness. Tell-tale in the title means something which makes something else extremely obvious: e.g. chocolate around your mouth is a tell-tale sign that you have just eaten some. The story is told from the point of view of the narrator, who says that he has problems with his nerves, but is convinced that he is not mad. He tells the story of his growing obsession with his elderly neighbor’s eye, which he calls the Evil Eye. This dangerous obsession makes him want to kill the old man.

- candle
- bird
- terror
- pale
- wise
- free
- possession
- anger
- spider
- gun

Now read the story and check your answers.
It’s TRUE! – I’m nervous – very, very nervous. I have been very nervous and I am very nervous. But why do you keep saying I’m mad?

The sickness had made my senses sharper; it hadn’t destroyed them and it certainly hadn’t dulled* them. Above all, my sense of hearing was better than it had ever been before. I heard everything in the heavens and on the earth. I heard things in hell. So, how could I be mad?

Listen. Listen to my story, you’ll see how well, how healthily, I can tell it. I can tell you the whole story calmly, without even the smallest sign of madness.

I’m afraid I can’t tell you how the idea first came into my brain, but as soon as it was there, it haunted* me day and night. There was no reason for it. There was no anger in it. I loved the old man. He had never done anything to hurt me. He had never insulted me and I didn’t want his money. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! One of his eyes was like a vulture’s* eye. It was a pale blue eye with a film over it. Whenever he looked at me with that vulture eye, my blood ran cold; and so – very gradually – I made up my mind. The old man was going to die and I would be free of the eye for ever.

Now, this is important. You think I’m mad. Madmen know

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the tell-tale heart - (here) the obvious/evident heart
to dull – to make something less sharp
to haunt – (here) to make someone feel very worried
a vulture – a bird that eats dead bodies
nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wise and careful I was. I worked so hard and I planned every detail. I was so kind to the old man the week before I killed him. I was kinder than I’d ever been to him before. And every night, about midnight, I opened his door very gently, oh so gently. And then, when I had made a big enough opening, I put my head into the room, slowly. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cleverly I put my head in through the door. I didn’t want to disturb the old man’s sleep, so, each night, it took nearly an hour to put my head around the door. Would a madman be as wise as this?

My next move was to use my lantern*. I had covered it with black cloth so that no light at all was visible. Slowly now, I uncovered the cloth a very, very little. It was important to uncover it so that one small ray* of light shone out. I shone the ray of light on the vulture eye. I did this for seven long nights – every night just around midnight – but I found that his eye was always closed. With his eye closed, it was impossible to do the job; I had no problem with the old man, my problem was the Evil Eye. And every morning, early, I went bravely into his room, called his name and asked whether he had slept well. He never suspected that every night, just around twelve, I looked at him while he was sleeping.

On the eighth night, I was even more careful than usual when I opened the door. I felt wise, I felt stronger than I ever had before. To think that I was there, opening the door, little by little and he had no idea, he didn’t even dream that I was there. I almost laughed at the idea and perhaps he heard me; he moved on the bed, suddenly. Did I stop? No, the room was dark, so I knew he couldn’t see the door opening. I kept pushing it slowly, slowly.

*a lantern – a ray – a line of light from the sun or a light/lamp
Then I had my head inside the room. I was about to uncover the lantern in the usual way, when my thumb moved. A slight noise came from the lantern. It was slight, but the old man heard it. He sat up in bed and cried out, “Who’s there?”

I kept still and said nothing. For a whole hour, I didn’t move a muscle. I didn’t hear him lie down. So I knew that he was still there, sitting up, listening – just as I have done, night after night, listening to the mice in the wall.

Then I heard him groan* and I knew that he was terrified. It was the low groan that comes from the bottom of the soul. Many a night, when the whole world has been asleep, I have groaned in exactly the same way, from fear, from terror. I knew what the old man was feeling and I was sorry for him, but I was happy in my heart. I knew that he had been lying in bed, awake, since I had made that very first noise. I knew also that his fears were growing. He had been trying to imagine that there was no need to be afraid. He had been saying to himself – “It’s only the wind in the chimney – it’s only a mouse in the walls,” or “What am I afraid of? It’s a small insect walking across the floor.”

Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these thoughts, but it was in vain*. Of course, it was all in vain; because Death’s shadow was approaching him. Soon Death’s shadow would cover him completely and he would be its victim. He knew this – he couldn’t see me, but he could feel that I was in the room.

When I had waited a very long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I decided to open the lantern a little. I opened it slowly until a single ray, like a spider’s thread*, shot out and landed on the vulture eye.

to groan – to make a low sound when you are in pain
da thread – (here) the fiber a spider makes
in vain – without any success
It was open – wide, wide open – and I grew furious as I looked at it. I saw it perfectly clearly – a dull blue color with the horrible film. It chilled* me to the bone. I could see nothing else of the old man’s face or body, except that eye. I had directed the ray of light precisely, by instinct, onto the damned spot*.

As I explained to you before, you are making a mistake if you think I’m mad. The only problem that I have is the sharpness of my senses. This became very clear to me the next moment. I heard a low, dull, quick sound. It was the sound a watch makes if it’s wrapped up in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man’s heart. It made me even more furious, just like the beating of a drum makes a soldier much braver.

Even now, I stayed still, hardly breathing. I held the lantern ray so that I could still see the eye. I held it steadily. The hellish beating of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man’s terror must have been extreme! And still it grew louder, I say, still louder every moment!

I have told you that I’m nervous: so I am. And now, at the dead hour of the night, in the silence of that old house, this strange noise filled me with uncontrollable terror. For a few minutes longer, I stood still. But the beating grew louder and louder! It was so loud that I thought his heart would burst*. And now I had a new fear. What if a neighbor heard the sound of the old man’s heart beating?

The old man’s time had come! I shouted out and opened the lantern and ran into the room. He screamed once, only once. I pulled him onto the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled, happily. I had done it! But for many minutes, the heart continued

*to chill – to make something very cold
*to burst – to explode like a balloon
*damned spot – a quotation from Shakespeare’s Macbeth
beating, although the sound was fainter. Now it was too quiet for a neighbor to hear. Then, finally, it stopped. The old man was dead. I moved the bed and looked at the body. Yes, he was dead, stone dead*. I put my hand on his heart and left it there for many minutes. It wasn’t beating. He was definitely stone dead. His eye would never trouble me again.

If you still think I’m mad, you should listen to this. I was so wise when I hid the body. It was the middle of the night and I had to work fast before morning came. I worked quickly and silently. I cut the body into pieces. I cut off his head and his arms and his legs and I hid them under the boards in the floor. I was very careful. I replaced the boards very cleverly. No human eye would know that they had been moved, not even the old man’s. There was no blood anywhere, there was nothing to wash, no spot of blood, no stain of any kind, when I had finished. I was so clever – I had used the bath – ha! ha!

I looked at the time, it was four o’clock in the morning and it was still dark. Then I heard a knock at the street door. I went down to open it, with a happy heart – after all, I now had nothing at all to fear. There were three men at the door. They introduced themselves, politely. They said that they were police officers. They said that a scream had been heard in the middle of the night and that the neighbors were worried. They were afraid that a crime had been committed and so had called the police. The police officers said that they wanted to search the house.

I smiled – I had nothing to fear. I said that I had screamed in my sleep – a bad dream. I said that the old man was away on a visit to the country. I took my visitors into every room in the house. I told them

*stone dead – completely dead
Edgar Allan Poe

to search well. Then I took them to the old man’s room. I showed
them his things – his money was still there and all his treasures
were still there, safe and secure. I was so confident! It was a perfect
triumph*! I brought chairs into the room and told them to sit down.
I myself sat down; I put my chair over the place where the pieces of
the old man’s body were lying!

The officers were satisfied. I had convinced them. I was very
comfortable. They sat, and while I answered happily, they chatted
about normal things. Soon, however, I felt pale and wished that they
would go. My head was aching and I began to feel a ringing in my
ears: but still they sat and still they chatted. The ringing became
clearer. I talked more freely to forget the feeling, but it carried on,
until I realized that the ringing was not actually in my ears.

No doubt I was now even paler. Still, I talked more fluently. I raised
my voice, but the sound grew louder. What could I do? It was a low,
dull, quick sound. It was the sound a watch makes if it’s wrapped up
in cotton. I knew exactly what it was. I talked more quickly – more
loudly; but the noise steadily increased.

I stood up and walked around. I talked loudly about nothing; but
the noise steadily increased. Why would they not go? I walked up and
down the room with heavy steps, as if I were excited by the police
officers’ chatting – but the noise steadily increased.

Oh God! What could I do? I talked loudly – I shouted! I moved the
chair so that it made a terrible noise across the floor, but the noise
was louder than ever before and continually increased. It grew louder
– louder – louder!

And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible?

*a triumph – a great success*
Could they not hear it? Almighty God! – no, no! They heard! – they suspected! They knew! – they were laughing at me, laughing at my horror.

This I thought and this I think now. But anything was better than the agony* of this noise! Anything was better than the shame of them laughing at me! I could tolerate anything except this! I felt that I had to scream or die!

And now – again! – listen! louder! louder! louder! louder!

“Right!” I screamed. “That’s enough! I killed him! I admit it! I did it! He’s here under the boards in the floor! But stop that noise! Stop that terrible noise! Stop that beating of his terrible heart!”

*agony – terrible pain
AFTER-READING ACTIVITIES

Stop & Check

1 Are the statements true (T) or false (F)? Correct the false statements.

1 The narrator is certain that he isn’t mad.  ■ □

2 The narrator had always had problems with the old man. ■ □

3 Every night, about midnight, the narrator went to talk to the old man. ■ □

4 On the night of the murder, the old man was asleep when the narrator shone the light on his eye. ■ □

5 The police officers came to the house, because the neighbors had heard screaming. ■ □

6 The narrator could hear the sound of the old man crying under the floor. ■ □

Word-building

2a Complete the table using words from The Tell-Tale Heart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>noun</th>
<th>adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bravery</td>
<td>sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>furious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>careful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wisdom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dullness</td>
<td>clever</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2b Complete these quotations from the story with adjectives from the box.

1 “You should have seen how ________ and careful I was.”
2 “I had no problem with the old man, my problem was the ________ Eye.”
3 “On the eighth night, I was even more ________ than usual when I opened the door.”
4 “It made me even more ________, just like the beating of a drum makes a soldier much braver.”

Grammar for First

3 Use of English. Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given. You must use between two and five words, including the word given.

1 I had never opened the lantern before.
   first
   It ......................................................... I had ever opened the lantern.
2 You should have seen how wise and careful I was.
   wish
   I .......................................................... how wise and careful I was.
3 “Did you sleep well?” I asked.
   whether
   I .............................................................. well.
4 It took less time to clear up than I expected.
   as
   The clearing-up didn’t ........................................ as I expected.
5 I advised the police officers to search the house well.
   were
   “If ................................................................. search the house well.”
Writing and Speaking

4a Make notes in the box about the events in *The Tell-Tale Heart* from the police officers' point of view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>your arrival at the house</th>
<th>your first impression of the narrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>your search of the house</td>
<td>the narrator’s confession</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4b You have to give evidence at the narrator’s trial. Use your notes to write a full report for the court.

4c Role Play. Work in pairs. You are in the court. One person is a prosecution lawyer, the other is a police officer.

Lawyer: ask as many questions as you can.
Police Officer: answer the questions to tell your story.
Vocabulary

5a Explain the difference between the words below.

1. a watch and a clock
2. to groan and to scream
3. a thumb and a finger
4. a lantern and a light
5. a shadow and shade
6. to knock and to ring

5b Fill the gaps with words from 5a.

1. He looked at his _______. It was nearly midnight.
2. I hate sitting in the sun. I prefer to be in the _______.
3. We lit the _______. It was quite romantic.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Listening

6a The next story is called The Masque of the Red Death. What do you expect the story to be about? Tick the box or boxes.

- a sickness or disease
- a long journey
- a ball or party
- a murder

6b Listen to the first part of The Masque of the Red Death. Are these statements true (T) or false (F)?

1. The Red Death was a disease.  T  F
2. It was a very quick way to die.  F  T
3. Prince Prospero was unhappy.  T  F
4. The prince chose the abbey because it was safe.  F  T
5. There were no servants in the abbey.  T  F
6. Nobody was allowed to go in or out of the abbey.  F  T
FOCUS ON...

Meteorology

In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Roderick and the narrator are both aware of a strange glow in the sky and around the lake. Light and weather conditions could cause such similar effects.

Rainbows

We all know about the colors we see in a rainbow. Can you remember why they happen? First of all, you can’t see a rainbow unless the sun is shining behind you. There also needs to be humidity in front of you. We see rainbows when the light of the sun is refracted through a drop of rain (or lots of drops of rain): see diagram.

This causes the light to be split into its different colors. It’s a scientific phenomenon. There probably isn’t a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, actually, there isn’t even an end! Rainbows are part of a circle - we just don’t always see the whole circle, unless we’re in an airplane.

aurora borealis

Perhaps the strange glow in *The Fall of the House of Usher* could have been caused by *aurora borealis*. This strange phenomenon is seen in the sky near the North and South Poles. Near the North Pole, it’s called *aurora borealis*, meaning the Northern Dawn. Most people call it the Northern Lights. Near the South Pole, the effect is very similar and its name is *aurora australis*, or Southern Lights. It happens when charged particles are attracted by the magnetic poles. Colored light is radiated when they strike gas particles in the atmosphere. The colors from the *aurora* range from yellow and green to red and blue.
Mirage
A mirage is another trick of the light. Although they are associated with deserts, you can even see a mirage on a road on a hot day. Your eye thinks it sees water, but there isn’t any. Why does this happen? Just like with a rainbow, light is refracted from warmer air towards cooler air. Because the air near the road is hotter than the air in the sky, light rays seem to hit the eye from a different place. This causes it to look like there is water on the road - or in the desert - in front of you, when there isn’t.

Fog or Smog
Perhaps the ground was particularly warm in the area around the House of Usher. If that were the case, then maybe the glow was actually fog. If there were no clouds in the sky, the ground would radiate heat. That would cause it to cool very quickly when it hit the air and form water vapor - fog - near the ground. If it were in a smoky, industrial area, the water vapor could mix with particles from smoke and form smog.

Task
Internet research
Have a look on the Internet. Find out more about smog. What are its causes and what are its effects? Write a paragraph about it.
TEST YOURSELF

1 Answer the questions about these *Stories of Mystery and Suspense*.

1 Do you think the narrator in *The Tell-Tale Heart* is mad? Why?

2 What does the clock symbolize in *The Masque of the Red Death*?

3 Describe the prison cell in *The Pit and the Pendulum*.

4 In *The Premature Burial*, what is the narrator’s greatest fear?

5 According to the text of *A Descent into the Maelström*, what exactly is the Maelström?

6 What is Dupin’s criticism of the Paris police in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*?

7 Why does Dupin return to the Minister’s apartment in *The Stolen Letter*?

8 How does the narrator feel about his second wife in *Ligeia*?

9 What happens to Madeline in *The Fall of the House of Usher*?

2 Find a word in English for these definitions. The words are all from the glossary.

1 To make a low sound when you are in pain

2 To have the courage to do something

3 Darkness

4 Able to move very well and very easily

5 To ask someone for money because you know something bad about them

6 To shine or be light when everything is dark
SYLLABUS

Level B2
This reader contains the items listed below as well as those included in previous levels of the ELI Readers syllabus.

Verbs:
tenses with This is the first ..., Present Perfect Continuous, Past Perfect Continuous, perfect infinitives, Future Perfect, a wide variety of phrasal verbs, complex passive forms, wish/if only

Types of Clause:
type-three conditionals, mixed conditionals, relative: embedded, defining

Modal Verbs:
might, may
STAGE 1  
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*  
Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*  

STAGE 2  
William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*  
Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*  
William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*  
Bram Stocker, *Dracula*  

STAGE 3  
Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*  
William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*  
Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*  
Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*  
Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*  

STAGE 4  
James Joyce, *Dubliners*  
Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*  
Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*  
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*  
Edgar Allan Poe, *Stories of Mystery and Suspense*  

STAGE 5  
Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*  
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*  

STAGE 6  
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*  
Janet Borsbey & Ruth Swan, Editors, *A Collection of First World War Poetry*  

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*  
Natsume Sōseki, *Botchan*
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