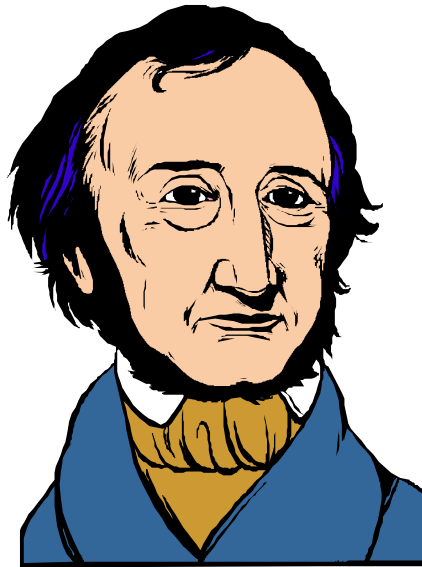


**EDGAR ALLEN POE:
TERROR OF THE SOUL**



CFE 3236V

OPEN CAPTIONED

PBS VIDEO

1995

Grade Levels: 10-13+

60 minutes

DESCRIPTION

Describes Poe's life and works. Contains a variety of perspectives on his writings, lifestyle, and personality as studied by critics, poets, historians, biographers, composers, playwrights, and scholars. Presents biographical information, including one account of Poe's death. Includes excerpts from many of his poems and short stories, including the complete dramatization of "The Cask of Amontillado."

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

- To present the biography of Poe.
- To dramatize selected excerpts from the poems and stories of Poe.
- To examine Poe's works from a variety of perspectives, including those of critics, historians, composers, biographers, and other poets.
- To identify Poe's style of writing and its impact on literature, the short story, detective stories, and the unsolved mystery.
- To demonstrate the recurring themes in Poe's writing.
- To stimulate critical thinking in the analysis of Poe's works in relation to his lifestyle and biographical information.

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Preview the video to determine unfamiliar vocabulary and language concepts.
2. Read selected poems and stories by Poe.
3. Locate and present various photographs of Poe.
 - a. Prepare a pictorial time line of how he looked at the various stages of his life.
 - b. Label the photographs with publishing dates and titles published circa.
4. Watch for discrepancies and controversies surrounding circumstances in Poe's life and death as presented in the video.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. Create a web of the various topics used to characterize Poe's works, such as violence, ugliness, decay, and decomposition.
2. Analyze the positive and negative comments made by the critics of Poe. Evaluate his literary accomplishments in light of these criticisms.
3. Discuss what is meant by "the art of leaving things out" as it relates to Poe's authorship.
4. Retell the biographic milestones in Poe's life.
 - a. Recount the events surrounding the deaths in his family.
 - b. Discuss how the tragedies in Poe's life are reflected in the treatment of death in his writings.
5. Report on the invention and impact of power presses in the printing industry.
 - a. Describe how this affected the writings of the authors during this period in history.
 - b. Explain how this impacted magazine publication and circulation.
6. Discuss Poe's role as a magazine editor and critic.
 - a. Define the term *literary tomahawk* in describing Poe.
 - b. List the well-known authors whose works Poe solicited and printed.
7. Discuss Poe's role in the development of the short story into an art form.
8. Describe Poe's personality, including his relationships with family members, employers, and colleagues.
9. Discuss and give examples of the conventions of Gothic fiction used by Poe: the grotesque, the outlandish, and the bizarre.
10. Explain why the death of Poe's mother is said to be the main event in his life.

- a. Give examples of how Poe treated death and burial in his writing.
 - b. Discuss the theory of some critics and scholars that the main characters in Poe's works are all actually Poe himself.
11. Which poem of Poe's was and still is the most famous? In what year did he write it? How was its popularity enhanced?
12. What new genre of literature is Poe credited with developing?
- a. In what setting did these mysteries take place?
 - b. After which of Poe's characters was Sherlock Holmes patterned?
13. How does Poe disarm his readers and dispel their disbelief?
14. Define the phrase *the audience of the psyche*. Discuss how this applies to Poe's work.
15. To what unique circumstances is the theatrical element of Poe's writings attributed?
- a. How is Poe an entertainer?
 - b. What elements of drama does he include in his fiction?
16. Using his own words, summarize how Poe wanted to be remembered and the effect he wanted to have on the literature of his time.
17. In what condition did Poe die?
- a. How much financial security had he amassed?
 - b. What was his occupation at the time of his death?
 - c. What were his relationships with others when he died?
18. Discuss the characters in Poe's works. Analyze the realistic aspects of their personalities and actions.
19. List Poe's literary accomplishments.
20. Discuss the effects of the work of Charles Baudelaire as a critic and translator of Poe's writings.
21. List the fears Poe was said to have had.
- a. Discuss the circumstances of Poe's life that related to these fears.

- b. Discuss how these fears were expressed in his writing.
- c. Debate whether his writings are expressions of his own fears, or if the terror he expressed was purely due to his literary genius.

Applications and Activities

1. Research the poetry of Poe and locate the poems from which excerpts were used in the video.
 - a. Discuss and interpret these poems.
 - b. Discuss the appropriateness of their use and placement within the video story line.
2. Research the circumstances surrounding Poe's death.
 - a. List various speculations as to the cause of death.
 - b. Debate the theories of his death. Include supporting documentation.
3. Research and report on Gothic fiction. Compare it to the fiction written by Poe.
4. Research Poe's use of alcohol. Evaluate the opposing views of scholars on this issue.
5. Reread the specific short stories highlighted in the video. Evaluate and critique the performances of the actors.
6. Dramatize selected portions of Poe's other short stories.
7. Select several of Poe's main characters and do extensive character studies.
 - a. Compare character traits.
 - b. Determine whether there is a common hero type in Poe's stories.
 - c. Include supporting documentation and examples.
8. Research and analyze Poe's marriage and relationship with Virginia.
9. Hypothesize how a Freudian scholar would interpret Poe's personality, lifestyle, and writings.

10. Evaluate the claim that Poe's life was "one long suicide." Cite examples from Poe's own words that support or deny this claim.
11. Research the story of the construction of Poe's tombstone.
 - a. Include the ritual held there on Halloween.
 - b. Prepare a detailed report on the location of the tombstone and the reason for its location.
12. Compare the writings of Poe with those of Henry James.
13. Compare the eccentricities of Poe with those of van Gogh.
14. Locate the works of other authors whose writings contain incidents of premature burial. Compare to Poe's works on this subject.
15. Research the relationship between Poe and John Allan. Discuss the implications of this relationship and its effect on Poe's life.
16. Research and report on the "Golden Age of Periodicals" and how this impacted on Poe's writing career.
17. Locate Poe's writings as a critic of other authors of his day. Evaluate his criticisms of these well-known authors.
18. Review Alfred Kazin's final analysis of Poe's personality. Evaluate Kazin's assessment.
19. Discuss the reasons the man who died in Baltimore was barely recognizable as Poe.
 - a. Write an essay with the premise that it was *not* Poe.
 - b. Include a believable fictional account of how and when Poe's life ended.
20. Report on the work of Rufus Griswold and its damaging effect on Poe's reputation.

SUMMARY

"The function of tragedy is to provide a catharsis through pity and terror." These are the words of Aristotle as he sought to describe tragedy long before Edgar Allan Poe introduced his tales of terror and

mystery. Excerpts, dramatizations, and quotations from Poe's poems and stories depict his vivid imagination and skill as a journalist.

Critics, poets, historians, composers, biographers, and scholars comment on the writing, the personality, and the biographical data on Poe, while analyzing several of his works. "The Tell-Tale Heart," part of which is dramatized on-screen, introduces the ideas of madness and believability. Other examples of his works which are quoted and/or briefly dramatized include "The Black Cat," "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Annabel Lee," "The Raven," and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

Poe's strong theatrical elements are attributed to his parents who were both actors. He was orphaned at an early age and raised by John Allan, a patron of the theater. The death of Poe's mother is characterized as the single main event in his life. He never felt loved by Allan, who did not adopt Poe. They quarreled and parted ways when Allan refused to support Poe financially in his second term in college.

Poe had other tragedies in his short life. He married his 13-year-old first cousin, Virginia, whom he called "Sissy." From all accounts, they were thoroughly happy with each other. Virginia's mother, whom Poe called "Muddy," also lived with them. Both treated Poe with utmost affection. They are depicted as three desperate souls on a little island of their own. When Sissy died, Poe was devastated and destabilized. One critic feels that Poe died of a broken heart due to the loss of his wife.

Dying and death were part of Poe's life. He used these themes throughout his works, perhaps searching to understand them. He is said to have "transmogrified" death in his works. He used the style of Gothic fiction with a sense of the uncanny. His tales were called grotesque, arabesque, and terrifying, with recurring themes of being buried alive and coming back from the grave.

Poe's goal was to be a writer of poetry and short stories. He toured and gave public readings of his poetry. "The Cask of Amontillado" is adapted and dramatized as an example of Poe's literary genius in writing the short story.

Poe became a magazinist during this, the "Golden Age of Periodicals," when power printing presses revolutionized the publication industry. He became the editor of four separate magazines, soliciting the works of other known and respected authors of his day, including Irving, Sigourney, and Longfellow. Poe became known as a tough literary critic.

Poe created a new genre of literature, the detective tale. Although Poe died penniless, he had written over 70 short stories, hundreds of articles and book reviews, a novella, a philosophical treatise, and part of a play.

Even after his death Poe was denied recognition as a gifted writer. Genius, however, is seldom recognized by contemporaries. Nevertheless, Poe's stories and poetry endure as masterful and popular literature.