

Eckerd Theater Company

presents

Nightfall with Edgar Allan Poe

by Eric Coble

Expanding the Classroom

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About the Show

Nightfall with Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe stands alone in the flickering darkness, trying desperately to convince himself that he's not mad. Three brilliant tales spring from his troubled mind, tales that Poe himself considered among his best: *The Raven*, *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Adapted by award-winning playwright Eric Coble, *Nightfall with Edgar Allan Poe* captures both the poetry and the spine-chilling terror of Poe's originals. This is a haunting and highly theatrical staging of the work of one of America's greatest authors and a true master of the macabre.

Eckerd Theater Company

Eckerd Theater Company (ETC) is a touring company of professional artists, educators and administrators under the umbrella of The Marcia P. Hoffman Performing Arts Institute, the education center for Ruth Eckerd Hall at the Richard B. Baumgardner Center for the Performing Arts in Clearwater, FL. ETC seeks to provide the finest in performance and arts education experiences to family audiences of all ages. Since its inception in 1988, Eckerd Theater Company has performed for more than one million young people and their families throughout the state of Florida and in venues as far north as Canada and as far west as the Mississippi River.

From eight local performances of its first production in 1988 through 179 performances in the 2008-2009 season, ETC has been a proud ambassador of Ruth Eckerd Hall, creating professional productions of original works, adaptations of classic literature, and the finest published scripts for the theater. ETC productions entertain while they explore such themes as diversity, multiculturalism, self-worth, loyalty and tolerance.

ETC began touring the state of Florida in 1991. National touring began in 1993. Since 1996, the Company has been on the Florida Arts on Tour roster, a state program providing funds to allow productions to travel to remote and underserved parts of the state.

In 1998, Julia Flood took the reins as ETC Artistic Director. In 1999, a State of Florida Challenge Grant provided funds for The Florida Project, a collaborative process bringing national and Florida theater artists and educators together to develop a new theater-for-young-audiences piece about the South. ETC was invited to showcase at both the Southern Arts Exchange in 1999, and at the 2002 International Showcase of Performing Arts for Young People, performing alongside companies from Germany, Canada, the U.S. and the U.K.

Since February 2003, Eckerd Theater Company has made its home in the 182-seat Murray Studio Theater in The Marcia P. Hoffman Performing Arts Institute.

Background Information

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Poe was born in Boston on January 19, 1809 to two traveling stage actors, David Poe, Jr. and Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins. Both of Poe's parents died before Edgar reached the age of three. Some reports state they died within days of each other, others that David died in 1810. Elizabeth likely died Dec. 8, 1811. Orphaned, Poe was separated from his brother and sister and went to live with John and Frances Allan of Richmond. In 1812, Poe was christened Edgar Allan Poe (with the Allans presumably serving as godparents). Poe's early education consisted of schooling in London as well as America. In 1826, Poe began studying at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville (a school founded by Thomas Jefferson). He later left the University of Virginia over a matter of gambling debts and enlisted in the United States Army. After brief service in the army, Poe spent a few months at West Point. By the age of 22, Poe had already published three books of poetry.

In 1836, Poe married his 13-year-old cousin Virginia. They remained married until her death in 1847. During this time, Poe continued to write and work for several publications as both editor and contributor, producing such works as *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Raven*. When Virginia died in 1847, Poe was devastated by his loss and wrote, "Deep in

the earth my love is lying and I must weep alone." Poe sank into depression after Virginia's death. He wrote less frequently and turned to alcohol. In 1849, he was found on the streets of Baltimore in a feverish stupor, wearing clothes that were not his. The last moments of his life were spent drifting in and out of consciousness in the Washington College Hospital.



Poe's wife Virginia
Drawing courtesy of:
www.poedecoder.com

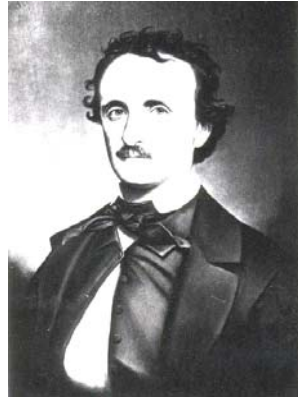


Photo courtesy of
www.poedecoder.com/QRisse/pics/index.php?pic=halling_portrait

Poe's Influence on Literature

Edgar Allan Poe was an American poet, short story writer and literary critic. His influence on literature has been immense, affecting writers such as Jules Verne, Charles Baudelaire, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, among others.

His short story *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and his three tales featuring Auguste Dupin created the detective story **genre**. Poe is also credited with mastering the short story, especially psychological horror stories. It has even been argued that Poe was the father of modern science fiction.

Poe defined poetry as the "rhythmical creation of beauty." In poetry, he displayed a **propensity** for rhythmic effect, particularly in poems such as *The Bells*, *The Raven* and *Annabel Lee*. The first line of *The Raven* is a good example: "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary..." He also frequently made use of alliteration and onomatopoeia.

While Edgar Allan Poe is widely associated with **grotesque** and **gothic** themes, he also shows evidence of humor and **satire** in his short stories and literary criticism (e.g., *The Devil in the Belfry*, *The Duc de l'Omelette*, *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*). His personal experiments with writing contributed to the development of his literary theories and criticism. The latter was at times quite scathing. Poe is quoted as saying the purpose of literature is "to amuse by arousing thought." Certainly many of his writings are thought-provoking while amusing and suspenseful. Popular association of Poe's work is entrenched in the complexity of the human mind, particularly in the darkness of fear, guilt and obsession. Stories such as *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Cask of Amontillado* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* have been reinterpreted and reproduced in films and popular television programs such as *Star Trek*, *Homicide: Life on the Street* and *The Simpsons*. Thus, Edgar Allan Poe's legacy as a master of suspense lives on two centuries after his birth.

Information courtesy of www.mysterynet.com/edgar-allan-poe/main.shtml, www.kirjasto.sci.fi/eapoe.htm, www.eapoe.org/geninfo/poechrom.htm, www.economicexpert.com/a/Edgar:Allan:Poe.htm, www.classiccrimefiction.com/historydf.htm, http://encarta.msn.com/text_761568650/Edgar_Allan_Poe.html

Background Information

Literary Forms and Devices

A **short story** is a condensed work of fiction that generally has a small number of characters engaged in a single action with a specific thematic focus. It can be read at one sitting. During the 1800s, many writers began to consider the short story as a separate form of literature. Edgar Allan Poe was perhaps the most important writer to analyze short stories as a distinct literary form. One of the elements of a short story particularly important to him was “unity of effect.” It was imperative to Poe that all elements of a story contribute to a single emotional impact. The first book about writing short stories, *The Philosophy of the Short Story* (1901) by Brander Matthews, an American critic, contained many of Poe’s ideas.

Romanticism is a style in the fine arts and literature. It emphasizes passion rather than reason, and imagination and intuition rather than logic or science. Romanticism favors full expression of the emotions, and free or spontaneous action rather than restraint and order. **The Romantic Movement** usually refers to the period from around 1750 to 1870. During this movement, most writers were discontented with a commercial, inhuman and standardized world. To escape from modern life, the romantics turned their interest to remote and faraway places, the **medieval** past, folklore and legends, nature, common people and the supernatural. Romantic literature allowed a freer style of expression and more flexible form. It encouraged the mingling of genres (e.g., tragic-comedy) and favored convoluted, fast-paced plots and complex characters. By using first-person narration in his stories, Poe draws us into the state of mind of his characters, allowing us to identify more effectively with them, adding to the horror effect and intensity of the story.

One of Poe’s finest talents was his brilliant use of words or **diction** to describe or set the **tone** he desired. Two techniques that he used were **alliteration** and **onomatopoeia**. Alliteration occurs when two or more words in a sentence begin with the same sound. A “crawling, long and horrible snake” can become more terrifying with alliteration as a “slithering, slippery and slimy snake.” Examples from Poe’s *The Raven* are: “While I nodded nearly napping” (note the “n” sound) and “And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain” using “s.” This line about the rustling purple curtain is also a fine example of onomatopoeia, which is the use of a word or words whose sound imitates the sound represented. The repetitive “s” sounds in the line suggest the sound of rustling curtains. The “ur” sound in “purple” and

“curtain” suggests a darker, more foreboding atmosphere. Tapping and rapping are also examples of onomatopoeia in the following lines from *The Raven*:

“...suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.”

Another example is the word “buzz,” which suggests, as well as refers to, the sound made by bees.

Poe was a master at employing rhythm and sound to advantage. In *The Bells*, his poetry mimics the chiming of instruments:

To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells...

Irony is another device appreciated by Poe. For example, in *The Cask of Amontillado*, Montresor ironically shows concern for Fortunato’s health, even though he intends to kill him. He also appears to try to talk Fortunato out of trying the Amontillado (sherry), even though Montresor clearly wants to get Fortunato drunk. Even Fortunato’s name is ironic, since death by starvation and dehydration as a result of being buried alive in a wall does not coincide with his “fortunate” name.

Hyperbole (exaggeration) is another device used in *The Cask of Amontillado* when Montresor refers to “The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could.” The injuries may have been many, but one thousand is clearly not a factual count.

Poe uses **metaphor** when he refers to the drunken Fortunato’s eyes as “two filmy orbs...” In *The Raven*, he also refers to the night as a “Plutonian shore,” referring to the god of the underworld (Pluto).

Foreshadowing is another favorite device used by Poe. The appearance of the raven as the narrator ponders the death of his beloved Lenore is one example. The beating of the dead man’s heart in *The Tell-Tale Heart* is another. When Fortunato states (in *The Cask of Amontillado*), “I shall not die of a mere cough,” it foreshadows his death of starvation and dehydration, buried alive.

Poe was a master at using these and other literary devices to increase the impact of his writing.

Information courtesy of http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761559304_2/Short_Story.html, http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761573164/Romanticism.html, http://encarta.msn.com/text_761559304__0/Short_Story.html, http://encarta.msn.com/text_761568650__0/Edgar_Allan_Poe.html, www.associatedcontent.com/article/360964/poe_and_hawthornes_literary_technique..., www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=74799, www.poe200th.com/teachers-poes-technique.php

Vocabulary

Show Related

Genre—a particular type or category (of literary work, art, etc.)

Propensity—an innate inclination

Grotesque—characterized by ludicrous or incongruous distortion

Gothic—a style that emphasizes the grotesque and mysterious

Short Story—a relatively brief fictional prose composition that usually develops a single theme or mood

Romanticism/Romantic Movement—an artistic and intellectual movement that originated in the late 18th century and stressed strong emotion, imagination, freedom from classical correctness in art forms and rebellion against social conventions

Diction—the choice and use of words in speaking and writing

Tone—a general quality or atmosphere

Alliteration—the repetition of the same initial consonant sound in two or more words in a line of speech or writing for poetic or emphatic effect

Onomatopoeia—the formation or use of words that imitate what they denote

Satire—a literary composition, in verse or prose, in which human folly and vice are held up to scorn

Rhythmic effect—effect of the use of a uniform or patterned recurrence of a beat, accent, or the like

Hyperbole—obvious and intentional exaggeration

Irony—in literature, a technique of indicating, as through character or plot development, an intention or attitude opposite to that which is actually or ostensibly stated

Metaphor—a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance

Information courtesy of <http://encarta.msn.com> and *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*

Art Form Related

What is scenic design?

Scenic designers design the stage sets for plays. The scenic designer meets with the director to exchange ideas about what the sets should look like, which paint shades to use, etc. The scenery must fit the requirements of the script. The scenic designer might think about questions such as:

- Does the play take place inside, outside or both?
- Where is the action taking place: a home, a castle, a garden?
- What are the needs of the show?
- Do actors need to make entrances or exits through a door?
- Is there a lot of physical movement in the play that needs a large, open area?
- Are there scene changes for which sets have to be designed to change quickly and easily?
- What is the mood of the play? Warm and inviting? Cold and frightening? Happy or sad?

Setting the stage

Flat: an oblong wooden frame covered with muslin, canvas or thin plywood. Flats are painted and joined together to make walls onstage.

Ground rows: flats laid on their sides to make low scenery. Sometimes ground rows are made of plywood.

Box set: flats used to make three sides of a room. The audience looks at the set from the open fourth side.

Backdrop: a painted cloth hung across the stage as scenery. Usually backdrops can be raised and lowered by ropes and pulleys from the space above the stage.

Set models

Set designers often make scale models of their sets. This gives the director, technicians and actors a chance to see what it will look like. That way everyone has a chance to discuss any problems or difficulties the actors might have with it before the real thing is built. Costumes need to coordinate with the color and style of the set. Looking at a model, the lighting designer can plan where lamps should be placed.

The ground plan

The ground plan is a view of the scenery from above the stage.

Elevation

The elevation drawing shows how the scenery will look to the audience.

Expanding the Classroom through Discussion

Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever seen a movie or a play based on a book? What kinds of challenges do actors and playwrights have to overcome to successfully portray imaginative or supernatural occurrences (for example: walking through mirrors, having no shadow, or flying)?
2. What words come to mind when you hear the name: Edgar Allan Poe? Even if you haven't read one of his stories, what do you imagine he wrote about?
3. What is one of your favorite stories you'd like to see produced as a play? What kinds of changes would you make to the story to make it come to life with actors, sets and costumes?
4. What are some stories today that seem to have been influenced by Edgar Allan Poe? What themes of romanticism do these current stories share?

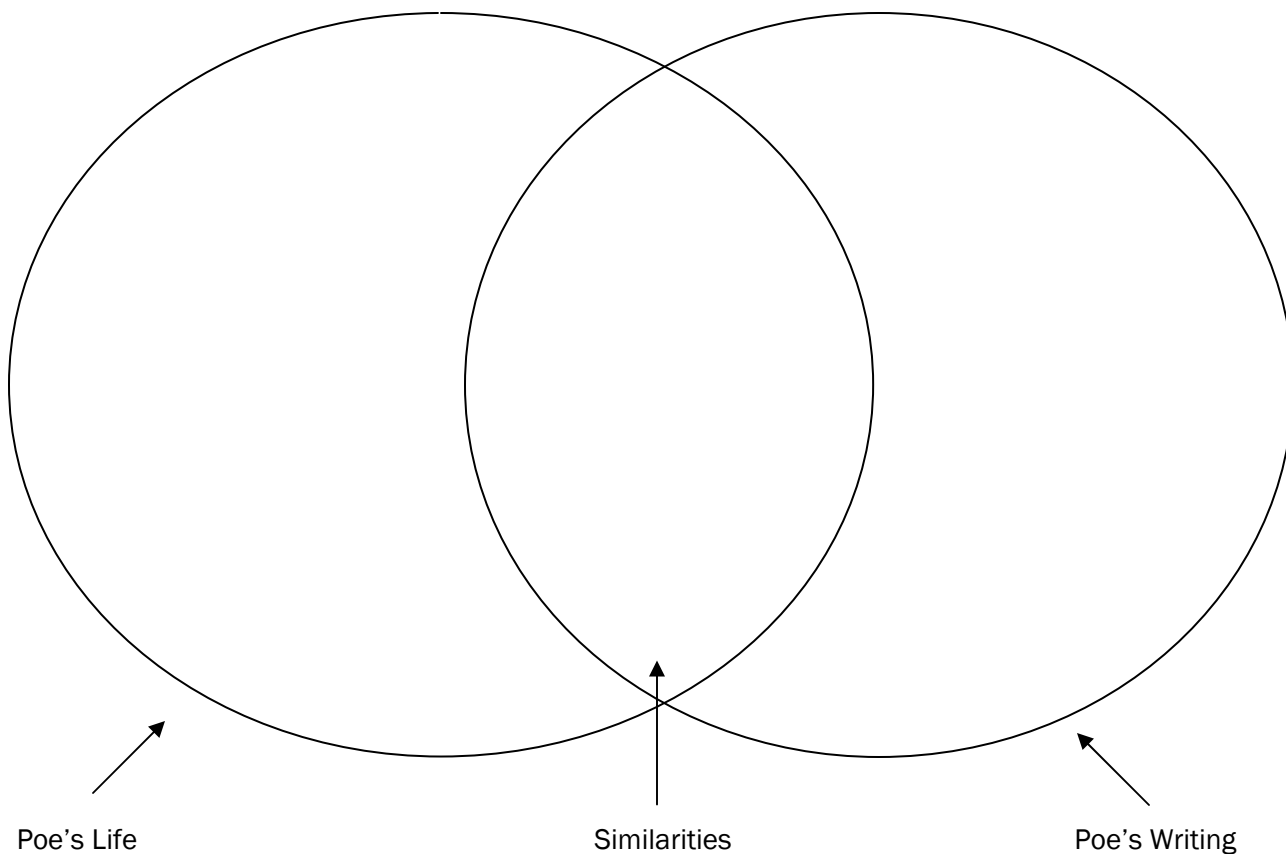
Post-Performance Discussion Questions

1. Before you saw *Nightfall with Edgar Allan Poe*, what words did you use to describe Poe's works in the pre-performance questions? Which of these characteristics did you see in Eckerd Theater Company's performance?
2. How were supernatural or imaginative occurrences portrayed (for example: by specific sound effects, make-up, costumes)? What kinds of pictures or stories did your imagination create when you watched the production?
3. *Nightfall with Edgar Allan Poe* opens with the character of Poe both defending and questioning his own sanity. Most of Poe's stories were written with a first person narrator. What do you think? Would a person have to be mad to write about the complex intricacies of guilt, fear, obsession and death? Do you think that Edgar Allan Poe was truly mad, or did he just have a fanciful imagination? Explain your response.

Teacher Guided Activities

Compare and Contrast Activity

If you haven't already done so, read the information on Poe's Life provided on page 2 of this study guide. Have students visit the Poe Museum online and read the section titled "Poe's Life." Provide each pupil with a copy of the Venn diagram and ask students to compare and contrast the information they have read about Poe's life with his writing and the characters and events in his stories. Ask students to write their responses in the appropriate areas of the diagram below.



Teacher Guided Activities

The Masque of the Red Death: Literary Analysis

Have students read Poe's story *The Masque of the Red Death* individually, with a partner, or as a class. Use the following questions and instructions for literary analysis:

1. What is the overall mood of this piece? What aspects of language and setting create this mood?
2. Cite examples of alliteration and onomatopoeia.
3. What elements of romanticism do you find in this story?
4. How does Poe manipulate his reader with wordplay and allegory (a tale in prose or verse in which characters, actions or settings represent abstract ideas or moral qualities)? For example, look up the words "masque" and "mask." How does Poe play with these ideas in his story?
5. Prince Prospero is the only one who "speaks" in this story (aside from the narrator). What do you think Prince Prospero represents? What does the name "Prospero" suggest to the reader?
6. What do you think is the theme of the story? What is the significance of the prince's actions of walling himself and his revelers (party-goers) in to escape the "red death"? What is the conclusion of the story?

Note: These questions can be asked as part of a quiz or in cooperative groups.



Eckerd Theater Company

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www.eckerdtheatercompany.com

Additional Resources

Ask your school or local librarian for help in locating these books for you and your students!

Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography
by Arthur Hobson Quinn

Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Volume I, Poems
by Edgar Allan Poe and Thomas Ollive Mabbott

The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe 1809 - 1849
by Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson

Check out these Internet sites for additional information!

www.mysterynet.com/edger-allan-poe/main.shtml

www.eapoe.org

<http://poedecoder.com/essays/masque/>

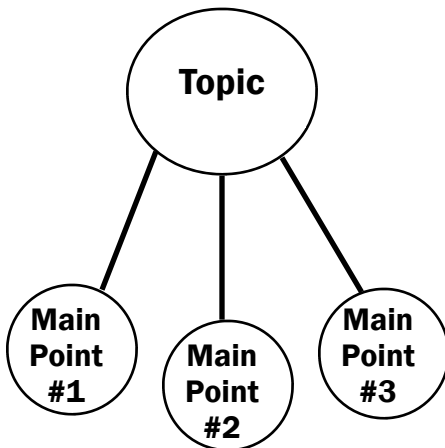
<http://americanheart.org>

www.poemuseum.org/poes_life/index.html

Writing Connections

There are many components in a live theatrical production. Before you begin writing, think about some of the different components of this performance (e.g., actors, characters, costumes, lighting, sound, etc.). Now explain in writing which aspect of the performance *Nightfall with Edgar Allan Poe* you enjoyed most and why.

Helpful Hints



Paragraph #1—Introduction: In the first sentence, introduce your topic. In the next three sentences, state what your three major points are (one in each sentence). Finally, write a concluding sentence.

Paragraph #2—In the first sentence, tell what your first major point is. Then, in the body of this paragraph, give lots of good details about your first major point. Finally, write a concluding sentence.

Paragraph #3—In the first sentence, tell what your second major point is. Then, in the body of this paragraph, give lots of good details about your second major point. Finally, write a concluding sentence.

Paragraph #4—In the first sentence, tell what your third major point is. Then, in the body of this paragraph, give lots of good details about your third major point. Finally, write a concluding sentence.

Paragraph #5—Conclusion: Restate what you wrote in your first paragraph.

Language Arts: Writing; Theatre: Aesthetic and Critical Analysis

We want to hear from YOU! Write to us at The Marcia P. Hoffman Performing Arts Institute at Ruth Eckerd Hall, 1111 McMullen Booth Road, Clearwater, FL 33759

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Student Guide Standards

Page 1 – Language Arts: Writing; Theatre: Aesthetic and Critical Analysis

Page 2 – Language Arts: Information, Media and Technology Literacy; Science: Biology; Health Education: Literacy, Responsible Behavior, Advocate and Appreciate Healthy Living

Page 3 – Language Arts: Writing; Science: Biology

Page 4 – Brain Teasers; Language Arts: Reading