

LEARNING RESOURCE MATERIAL



EDGAR ALLAN POE

The Raven

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY RYAN PRICE



About the Visions in Poetry Series

Visions in Poetry is an award-winning series of classic poems illustrated by outstanding contemporary artists in stunning hardcover editions.

About The Raven

“The Raven” was originally published in 1845 in a New York newspaper. It’s the tale of a scholar, brooding over the death of his beloved Lenore, who is visited on a stormy December night by an ominous bird.

Ryan Price’s illustrations create a backstory for the poem where the troubled narrator is obsessed with old photos of Lenore (whose death, it is later suggested, he is responsible for). The appearance of a raven, the ghostly presence of Lenore and the narrator’s descent into madness are symbolized by shifting images until finally the narrator is depicted in what appears to be a hospital ward or asylum cell.

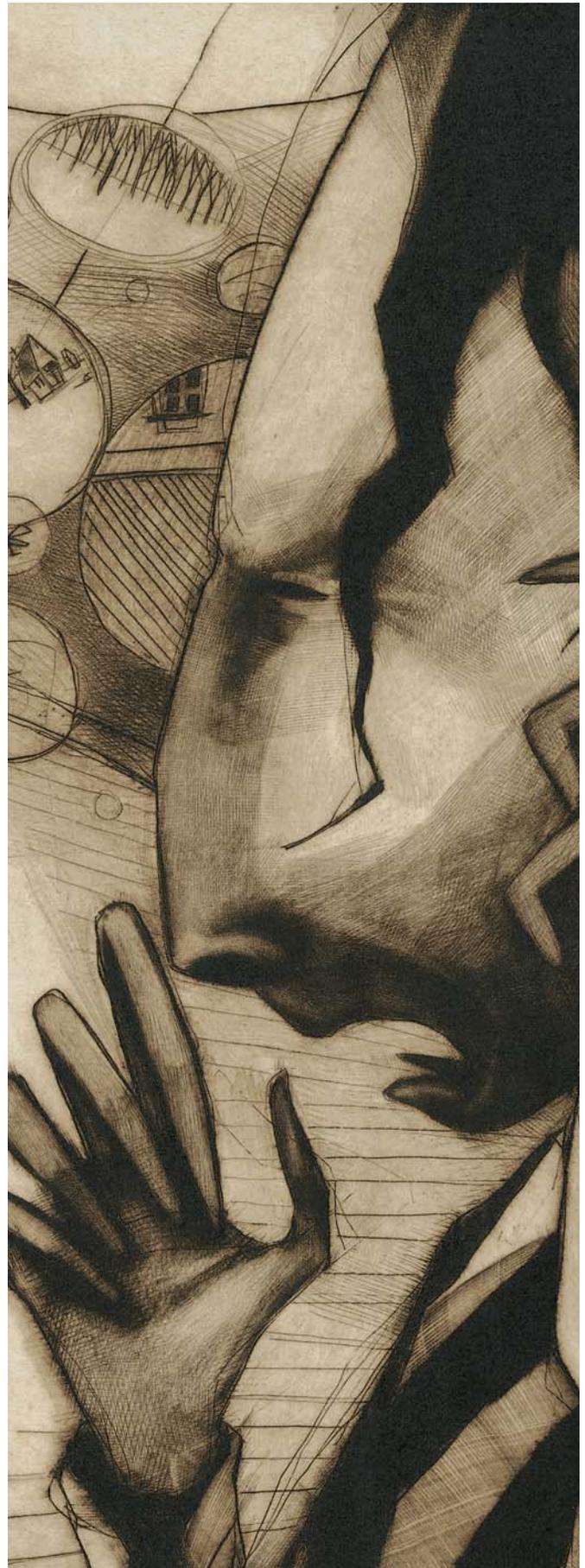
The stunning illustrations were created with the drypoint printmaking technique, a medium known for its intense rich blacks and line quality. This technique is particularly appropriate for this book, since drypoint was popular in Poe’s day.

About the Author

American poet and writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) is one of the most famous and influential writers in the English language. He is particularly well known for his poetry and for short stories such as “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Cask of Amontillado.” Readers have never ceased to be intrigued by the macabre and pathological elements in his work.

About the Illustrator

Ryan Price is a fine artist and printmaker who lives in Guelph, Ontario, with his family. The Raven is the first book he has illustrated.



Discussion Topics and Activities

The following discussion topics and activities are suitable for classes in language and literature, media and visual arts.

Please note that some of our activities in this learning resource require students to visit their local library or use the Internet for research.



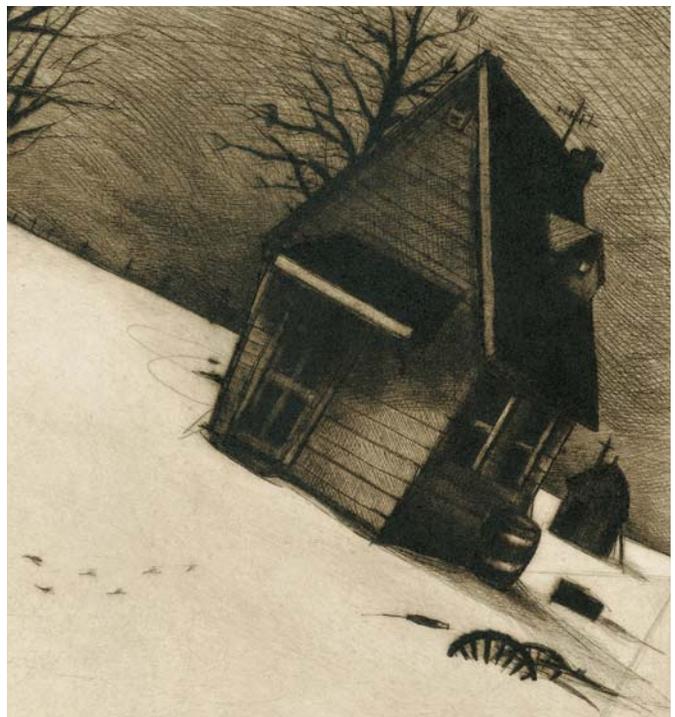
1 Throughout the poem “The Raven” the narrator hints at his relationship with Lenore, but their relationship and the cause of Lenore’s death are never fully explained. “Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,/And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor./Eagerly I wished the morrow; – vainly I had tried to borrow/ From my books surcease of sorrow – sorrow for the lost Lenore – ”

Divide your class into groups of three or four and ask each group to create a prequel to the poem. The prequel should be written in verse and should answer the following questions: Who is Lenore? Who is the narrator? How did they meet? What type of relationship did they share? How did their relationship develop? What happened to Lenore? Ask students to create artwork to accompany the text. Once each group has finished creating a prequel, have them present it to the class.

2 As part of an individual in-class assignment, ask students to write an obituary for Lenore. Explain to students that they should write her obituary as a character sketch. Students should include the following information: a description of how she passed away; a description of her personality; a description of the relationship she shared with the narrator; and background information about her life, for example, did Lenore have friends and a family? Did she work? If yes, what type of job did she have? Students should also include their own illustration of her. Once everyone has completed the assignment, ask each student to share his/her work with a classmate.

3 As part of an individual assignment, ask students to write a book review of “The Raven”. Explain to students that they should comment on both the text and the art.

Before students begin the assignment, have a discussion with your class about how a review is structured, for example, a synopsis, good criticism, bad criticism and an evaluative component (i.e. would you recommend it). Ask students to bring in book reviews from various local newspapers to read in class and use as reference for this assignment. The review should be minimum one page and maximum two pages. Ask each student to present his/her work to the class.



4 The raven is a symbolic character in the poem. As part of a class discussion, ask students to answer the following questions: What role does the raven play in the poem? What or who does the raven symbolize in the poem?

As part of a research assignment, divide students into groups of three or four and ask each group to explore ravens as symbols in different cultures throughout history, for example, Native American mythology and Norse mythology. Once each group has completed their research, ask them to present their work to the class.

5 Assonance and alliteration are literary devices used by the author throughout the poem. With your class, have a discussion about each literary device. Begin the discussion by providing students with the following definitions and examples: Assonance is the repetition of similar vowel sounds in words that are found near each other, for example, “On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.” Alliteration is the repetition of similar consonant sounds in words that are found near each other, for example, “While I nodded, nearly napping.”

Divide students into groups of three or four and ask each group to go back through the poem and attempt to locate as many examples of the use of assonance and alliteration as they can find in each verse. Have each group discuss the effect each literary device has upon the text. Ask students to answer the following questions: Are these useful techniques? Why or why not? Next, ask each group to create a short poem made up of eight to ten verses and attempt to incorporate both literary techniques. Have each group share their poem with the class after they have completed the assignment.

6 Ryan Price used a method of printmaking known as drypoint to create the art for “The Raven.”

As part of an individual writing assignment, ask students to research the history of printmaking and one of the following related techniques: drypoint, etching or engraving. Explain to students that the work should be no less than two pages and no more than four pages. As part of the assignment, have students research the following information: the origin of the technique; a detailed description of the technique; a description of the tools used in the technique; and, if possible, a list of artists that use or have used the technique and examples of their artwork. Ask each student to hand in his/her assignment once it has been completed.

7 Ryan Price incorporates many clues and hints about his own interpretation of the poem throughout his artwork.

Divide students into groups of two or three and ask each group to go back through the book and re-examine the details on each page and work together to interpret the clues and hints, for example, the framed images on the walls, the bird prints on the floor, Lenore’s image in the television screen, etc. Have students answer the following questions: What do the clues or hints reveal about the poem? Do the clues and hints clarify the poem or create more confusion? Do the clues and hints reveal a background story? What do you learn about the characters through the artwork? What else do you learn about the poem through these clues and hints? As part of a class discussion, ask each group to share their responses with the class.

