

“The Pit and the Pendulum”, by Edgar Allan Poe

"The Pit and the Pendulum" is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe that was first published in 1842. The story is about a prisoner of the Spanish Inquisition who survives physical and psychological torture until he's rescued by French soldiers.

ACTIVITIES

1. Check the meaning of the following words before you start reading:

To pass out, to come to, limbs, unbearable, to dread, dungeon, to bury, damp, pit, captor, scythe, drowsy, prey, to strain your eyes

Words to learn

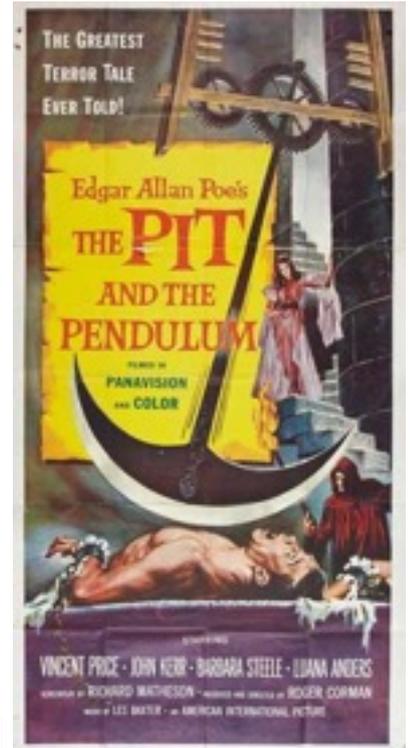
2. Briefly summarize the following elements:

- Plot: Give a brief summary of the piece.
- Setting: Describe the setting. What words or phrases help paint the picture?
- Characters: How does Poe portray the characters?
- Perspective: Who is the narrator? Describe this person's feelings. Is it written in third or first person? How does this affect the piece?

2. Identify the human emotions that are revealed in the story (Examples may include fear, sadness, regret, loneliness, obsession, anticipation, and helplessness.) Identify and create a list of words and phrases that portray these emotions.

3. Answer the following questions:

a. What did he discover when he came to?



- b. How would you feel if you found out you are in a dark place and there was no hope of escaping?
- c. Who is the Old Father Time? What is he carrying?
- d. Why was the main character drowsy all the time?
- e. What was the second method of destruction the captors had prepared for him?

4. Identify the literary figures in the following examples:

- a. The pit yawned

The fiery walls

- b. Splash as it hit the water

A menacing hiss

swishing pendulum

- c. Side to side with its dawdling downward progress

Against the sweep of the swinging steel

5. Choose ONE of the following projects.

This project will count as a test grade!

A. Task: "Alternative Ending"

Poe keeps readers guessing until the end, a multitude of possible endings can be explored. Have your students stay consistent with Poe's writing style, sentence structure, use of symbolism and word choices so their alternate endings flow with the rest of the story. Encourage students to write with the Gothic fiction genre in mind, using bizarre or horrifying themes to reveal important truths. You might have students start their alternate endings when the scorching hot room turns into a diamond shape and starts to close in on the protagonist,

B. Dramatic Monologues

Instruct students to write two- to three-minute monologues that could be read during critical scenes in the story. Students should focus on the prisoner's feelings, burdens and perceptions, as if they were writing firsthand journal entries from his point of view. Set the stage by turning off the lights, hanging a cardboard pendulum from the ceiling and having students read their monologues from an old wooden chair at the front of the room. Invite them to use voice inflections and dramatic pauses when reading their monologues aloud to the class.