

“The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe

Study Guide: Multiple Choice and Short Answer

Write your answers to all questions in this section on the lines provided. For multiple-choice questions, circle the letter of the best answer.

1. Reread the first paragraph of “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Based on the narrator’s tone, what can you predict about the story? On the lines provided, explain your answer.
 - a. The narrator will be unjustly accused of a crime.
 - b. The narrator will become calm in the story.
 - c. The narrator will show that he is deeply religious.
 - d. The narrator will be proved to be insane.

2. Why does the narrator decide to kill the old man? On the lines provided, explain your answer.
 - a. because he dislikes the man’s clouded blue eye
 - b. because he will inherit the man’s great wealth
 - c. because the old man insulted his intelligence
 - d. because he has made a bet that he can do it

3. How does Edgar Allan Poe build suspense in “The Tell-Tale Heart” as he leads up to the old man’s murder? On the lines provided, explain your answer.
 - a. He shows that the old man and the narrator have been friends for a long time.
 - b. He explains in detail the method that the narrator plans to use in order to kill the old man.
 - c. He has the narrator speak continually of the approaching death, while the victim is still alive.
 - d. He shows that the townspeople grow increasingly suspicious of the murderer.

4. What character traits does the murderer pride himself on? On the lines below, use a quotation from the story to support your answer.
 - a. his abilities to lie and steal
 - b. his intelligence and his patience
 - c. his wit and his confidence
 - d. his sneakiness and his fear

5. Why does the sound of the man’s groan in the middle of the night sound familiar to the narrator? On the lines provided, explain the cause of the sound.
 - a. The narrator has sometimes groaned in terror in the middle of the night.
 - b. The old man often groans, although this groan is louder.
 - c. The old man lives next door, and the narrator has often heard him groan.
 - d. The old man’s groan reminds the narrator of the blowing wind.

6. As he lies in wait, preparing to kill the old man, there is a persistent sound that the narrator finds disturbing. Identify the sound by using a detail from the textbook, and explain how it contributes to a feeling of suspense.

7. Review the definition of the word “crevice.” Select the correct meaning for the word. On the lines provided, give the context clues from the paragraph that contains the word crevice that help to determine its meaning.
 - a. large hole
 - b. narrow opening
 - c. bulb
 - d. eye

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8. At one point in “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the author writes: “As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door.”

What might the reader predict from this statement, and does the prediction turn out to be true?

9. Why do the officers stay long after they search the house and find no evidence of a crime?
- to learn about the old man and his habits
 - to wait until the sun rises so they can more carefully examine the room
 - to await their superior officer
 - to talk to the narrator and learn more about the crime
10. How do the officers learn that the narrator has murdered the old man? On the lines provided, explain why the narrator assists them in solving the case.
- They hear the beating of the murderer’s heart.
 - The murderer admits to committing the crime.
 - They discover the old man’s body in the house.
 - A neighbor who has witnessed the murder tells them who did it.

Extended Response

11. On the lines following each item, record events from each section of “The Tell-Tale Heart.”
- Exposition: (Conflict explained)
 - Rising Action: (Conflict developed)
 - Climax: (Point of greatest tension)
 - Falling Action: (Conflict resolved)
 - Resolution: Story ends
12. “The Tell-Tale Heart” is told from the murderer’s point of view. Is this an effective device for a mystery?
13. The author chooses the simile “sound [such] as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton” at two different points in “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Describe why, in both cases, the simile is a dramatic and useful tool for the author.