

# **Lesson Plan: Poe Readers' Theater**

Grade level: 10-12

Academic subject area: American Literature

Art form: Drama and Dance

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## **Lesson Plan: Poe Readers' Theater**

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**Brief summary of lesson:** Students choose key words, phrases, and sentences from two or more Edgar Allan Poe works. They then arrange these words, phrases, and sentences into a dramatic presentation that conveys a specific mood. Using any method of presentation, such as choral reading, dance, or pantomime, the students will share their "new" work with an audience of their peers.

**Resources/materials needed:**

- Copies of Edgar Allan Poe's poems and short stories, such as "The Raven," "The Bells," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Masque of the Red Death," etc.
- Student-chosen music and CD or MP3 players
- Simple costumes, such as black shirts
- Stools or chairs

**Academic objectives:**

1. Evaluate ways authors develop point of view and style to achieve specific rhetorical and aesthetic purposes (e.g., through use of figurative language irony, tone, diction, imagery, symbolism and sounds of language), citing specific examples from text to support analysis.
2. Evaluate how language choice, diction, syntax and delivery style (e.g., repetition, appeal to emotion, eye contact) effect the mood and tone and impact the audience.
3. Adjust volume, phrasing, enunciation, voice modulation and inflection to stress important ideas and impact audience response.

**Arts objectives:**

1. Create an imaginative and complex script using historical, cultural and/or symbolic information and refine it so that story and meaning are conveyed to an audience.
2. Synthesize knowledge of the arts through participation in the creation of a dramatic/ theatrical work or experience.

**Procedure:**

1. Divide students into groups of 4-5.
2. Encourage students to choose two works by Edgar Allan Poe that have a specific connection, such as an image or a mood.
3. In their groups, the students will examine the works and choose words, phrases, and/or sentences that they can re-purpose into a dramatic presentation. Stress that their presentation is not a narrative skit; instead, through the use of Poe's words, they will create a mood.
4. When introducing the assignment, emphasize Poe's use of strong imagery, repetition, and single effect. The students' end product would benefit from the use of these as well.
5. Direct students to websites, such as [www.comm.unt.edu/histofperf/rt2.htm](http://www.comm.unt.edu/histofperf/rt2.htm) for information on Readers' Theater. I provided the attached handout because my students do not have access to the Internet.
6. Provide class time to write the script and practice the presentation. Two classes of 50 minutes work well for this purpose. Give the students a time limit of 3-4 minutes for their presentations. Students may find that sound effects, music, lighting, and movement will enhance the mood they are trying to convey.
7. Depending on the number of groups, one class period should be sufficient for presentations.

## Student Handout: Edgar Allan Poe Readers' Theater

Your experience with the works of Edgar Allan Poe is evident: "The Raven," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Bells," and "The Cask of Amontillado"

You will now create a dramatic interpretation of *two or more* of Poe's works. Use the guidelines below. This is not a skit of one of his works: You must create the mood of EAP's writing through voices, sound effects, lighting, and movement. Costumes and props are either minimal or non-existent. Your presentation should be **approximately 3-4 minutes** long.

Consider the following general information about Readers' Theater:

- Readers' Theatre is an interpretive oral reading activity. Students use their voices, facial expressions and hand gestures to interpret the literary work.
- The intent of Readers' Theatre is to present a literary work in such a way that the attention of the audience is directed toward the author's creation.
- Presentation in Readers' Theatre differs from the conventional play in various ways, and one of them is that there is no attempt made to create the sense of reality on stage. In this aspect Readers' Theatre is **presentational** rather than representational. The images are formed not on stage but in the **minds of the audience** and the readers themselves--that's where the action takes place.
- There are several elements of Readers' Theatre that help create the unique experience of Readers' Theatre. The most prominent element is the physical **presence of the text** on stage. A script is visible to the audience no matter whether the performers actually read from it or not. The audience is constantly reminded that the text is the primary source for the performance.
- The **decorations on the stage are either nonexistent or minimal**. Since the scene locates in the imagination of the participants (audience and readers) the physical elements are not as important as aural. This applies not only to stage settings but to actors' actions as well. Readers usually sit on the stools behind the lecterns. The costumes are not used either, the performers are usually dressed in black (formal or informal wear).

(Information obtained from [www.comm.unt.edu/histofperf/rt2.htm](http://www.comm.unt.edu/histofperf/rt2.htm).)

### Grading Criteria:

- Use of text is effective and appropriate (Choose wisely)
- Accurate mood conveyed
- Creativity
- Professional Presentation (**Serious, Smooth, and Striking**)
- Effect and creativity of combining works
- A neatly typed and proofread script submitted on the day of the presentation
- Cooperation with group members

**Point Value:** 25 (10 for Script, 10 for Performance, 5 for Attendance/Work Ethic)

## Student Example: “The Raven” and “The Masque of the Red Death”

Narrator:

Once upon a midnight dreary,  
While I pondered weak and weary,  
The panes were scarlet a deep blood color,  
Thrilled me-filled me with fantasy and terrors never felt before.

Chorus:

Dreadful, dreary, really eerie,  
Creepy and terribly scary.

Narrator:

Deep into that darkness peering,  
Long I stood there wondering, fearing,  
There flows a ruddier light,  
Seeping through the gloomy night.

Chorus:

Dreadful, dreary, really eerie,  
Creepy and terribly scary.

Narrator:

Ghastly in the extreme,  
So melancholy it did seem,  
Dreadful, dreary, really eerie,  
Creepy and terribly scary.

Chorus:

Dreadful, dreary, really eerie,  
Creepy and terribly scary.

Narrator:

Howling, shrieking, shrilling cry,  
Swiftly flying by,  
'Tis the wind, nothing more.  
'Tis the wind, nothing more.

Chorus:

Dreadful, dreary, really eerie,  
Creepy and terribly scary.

Narrator:

Tall and narrow Gothic windows,  
Tinted with a deep blood color like no other,  
The blackness of the sable drapery appalls  
And the silken sad uncertain rustling of the curtains.

Chorus:

Dreadful, dreary, really eerie,  
Creepy and terribly scary.

Narrator:

But the silence was unbroken,  
And the darkness gave no token,  
Dreadful, dreary, really eerie,  
Creepy and terribly scary.

Chorus:

Dreadful, dreary, really eerie,  
Creepy and terribly scary.