

“Tell-Tale Heart”

by Edgar Allan Poe

I. Short Story

A. Theme of story: Imagination many times exaggerates what you see or hear, to seem more than it is. Suspense and mystery add to simple, strange doings!

B. Narrator: speaker or character who tells the story

C. Narrator of story: the man who murdered, who suffers from “overacuteness of the senses” and claims NOT to be mad or insane is the narrator. He is unnerving and peculiar.

C. Setting of story: an old house on a dark night, in the bedroom of an old man with a funny eye

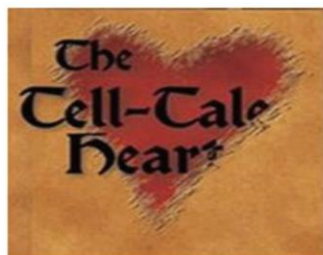
D. Protagonist: the main character in a literary work (the murderer/narrator)

E. Antagonist: the force in conflict with the main character (the old man)

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Mood and Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart”



What is mood???

mood = atmosphere

mood is the overall feeling created by a piece of writing

setting, images, and word choice all contribute to mood

UNIT 7: CRIME AND CONFESSION

15. THE TELL-TALE HEART (A STORY)

-Edgar Allan Poe

SUMMARY:

The narrator claims that he is not mad as he could hear things in heaven, earth and hell. To justify him saint, he confesses dangerous crime he has

committed. The narrator and the old man used to reside together; they had a very good relationship. The boy used to love the man very much. The old man also used to treat him well. The only thing that irritated the boy was his eyes. To end the consequences, he went to the old man's room continuously for seven days. But he returned as he could not see the eyes of the man. In the morning he spoke politely and behaved as if nothing had happened. On the eighth night, he as usual went there with a torchlight. He did everything stealthy and cautiously. Despite it, he happened to touch tin fastening, which dropped and disturbed the sleep of the man. In desperation, he asked who it was. The boy remained speechless and motionless. A little later his senses brought him the reason that the old man fell asleep again, he aimed the beam towards the old man's eyes. As he saw them, he grew angry. He then jumped towards the man, dragged the man and pressed his neck with the bed. At last, he dismembered the old man's dead body and put it under the plank. After it, he cleaned the place spotlessly clean. It was already four when he finished the task. At four, the three policeman appeared and rang the bell. The boy went there; welcome them bought to his room and took to every nook and corner of his hose. The policeman didn't suspect any wrong there. The boy took them to the spot where he had hidden the corpse of the old man. He cordially asked them to sit on the chair, which he had kept there. He sat there just over the plank. Even after talking long, they didn't go away. The boy felt uneasy. He heard the sound the heart that he mistook as old man's heart. Being unbearable, he told them that he killed the old man.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you call the narrator a mad man? Why? Why not?

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. 2076 SET B Q. NO. 2A

Explain the significance of the repetition of the words ... "low, dull, quick sound - much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton". Does this sound encourage the narrator to commit crime? [3] "The

- "Tell-Tale Heart" is a short story written by E. A. Poe. In the story, the narrator, who is the murderer, reveals to us how he has killed the old man. When he fails to kill the old man up to the seventh night, he becomes determined to take the life of the old man on the eighth night. On the eighth night, his thumb slips and falls on the tin of the lantern. This makes a sound. The old man wakes up and springs on the bed with fear. At the very time, the murderer hears a low, dull, quick sound - much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. This sound, the narrator, says arises from the bottom of the heart because of fear. Every night at midnight, the murderer finds the echo of this sound welled up. This sound makes the narrator angry but doesn't encourage him to commit the crime. The old man's eyes, like that of a vulture, rather encourage him to commit the crime. Low, dull, and muffled sound encourages him to tell the truth to the police officers. Actually, this was his own heart beat which betrayed him to tell the truth. Thus, this is the sound repeating in him. The sound doesn't encourage him to kill the man but to tell the truth.

2. 2076 SET C Q. NO. 2A

How does the old man annoy the narrator? [3]

- The narrator of the story 'The Tell-Tale Heart' annoys the narrator. The narrator and the old man used to reside together; they had a very good relationship. The boy used to love the man very much. The old man also used to treat him well. The only thing that annoyed the boy was his eyes. Actually, the old man possesses a vulture-like eye. It was pale with a pale film coated over it. Whenever the evil eye falls on the narrator, the very marrow of his bone chills out. He can no longer tolerate it. The very

eye forces the narrator to take the life of the old man. Similarly, the narrator is also vexed by the heartbeat of the old man. It also encourages him to commit crime.

3. 2076 PARTIAL E Q. NO. 2F

How does the narrator kill the old man? [3]

- The narrator in the story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" kills the old man. He says it is all because he wants to get rid of the old man's eyes. The narrator also reveals that the old man's vulturous eyes with a pale film over it vex him very much. Though the old man has not insulted him, has not done any wrong to him and neither does he have any greed for his property, the narrator doesn't like the old man's eyes. Thus, despite his love to the old man, the narrator kills him so as to be free from the pale vulture's eyes of the old man. After the murder, the narrator doesn't feel comfortable. He feels guilty. The narrator repents his crime. Thus, though he doesn't know how he feels nervous and takes his own heart beat for the dead old man's heart. Dead man's heart can never beat. In his unconscious mind, a sense of guilt, crime and repent get stored. He, therefore, can't conceal his crime. Feeling guilty, he confesses at the end that he has killed the old man.

4. 2075 SET C Q. NO. 2F

How is the reality of the murder exposed in the story? [3]

- The troubled narrator after the murderer is found to be betrayed by his own heart. On the eighth night, the narrator murdered the old man. He dismembered the parts after he killed the man and concealed them under the wooden planks. By the time he finished his work, the policemen came for investigation. Convinced by the narrator, they started conversing with him. Meanwhile, the narrator heard the sound. The sound became louder and louder and clearer. I heard a distinct sound of the old man's heart beat. But, since the murdered man's heart couldn't beat the narrator mistook his own heart beat for the old man's. Being nervous and filled with the sense of remorse and guilt, he confessed the truth. This is all because his heart betrayed him. He could hide the cold murder from all other but not his own heart. His heart did not accompany him. It betrayed the narrator by telling the truth that he killed the innocent old man and concealed his dead body under the planks.

5. 2074 SUPP Q. NO. 26

How long did the narrator plan to kill the old man? Why couldn't he kill him all those nights? [3]

- The narrator, the boy, of the story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" made up his mind to kill the old man. He made this plan of killing him almost a week ago. The narrator was angry at the old man because of the old man's vulture-like-eye. He wanted to get rid of the very eye by taking his life. So he made a plan to kill him but couldn't do it for seven long nights. . He went with a torch light thinking that he would see the eye of the old man. But every night he went at midnight and opened the door and lantern, he found the man asleep with his eyes closed. The boy, therefore, returned every night. He wanted to see the eye of the old man which could really vex him. Since he loves the old man he couldn't kill him if he didn't see his eyes. It was the eye, not the old man, who he was after. His efforts remained unsuccessful for seven nights as the old man didn't open his eyes and returned for seven nights because he didn't see what he wanted to see: old man's vulturous eye.

6. 2074 SET A Q. NO. 2B

Why does the narrator want to kill the old man? Why does his effort to kill him go in vain for seven nights? [3]

- The narrator of the story, "The Tell- Tale Heart" is a boy. He used to live in the old man's house. He had nothing to do with the old man but the only thing that irritated the boy was his eyes. To get rid of the eye like that of the vulture with a pale film over it, he went to the old man's room continuously for seven days. He went with a torch light thinking that he would see the eye of the old man. But every night he went at midnight and opened the door and lantern, he found the man asleep with his eyes closed. The boy, therefore, returned every night. He wanted to see the eye of the old man which could really vex him. Since he loves the old man he couldn't kill him if he didn't see his eyes. It was the eye, not the old man, who he was after. His efforts remained unsuccessful for seven nights as the old man didn't open his eyes and returned for seven nights because he didn't see what he wanted to see: old man's vulturous eye.

7. 2074 SET B Q. NO. 2B

Describe the scene in which the narrator kill the old man. [3]

- The nature of the crime is quite strange. It looks like the scene from the horror stories. Popular for his gothic setting, Poe presents this macabre scene of murder in the story, "The Tell- Tale Heart". One night, the old man hears the narrator at the door and wakes up. The narrator hands out there in the dark for a long time, then, with a scream, plunges into the pitch dark room, opens the lantern and directs towards the old man's eyes. Seeing his eyes, the narrator drags the old man off the bed. The old man screams only once. He then pulls the bed on top of the man. When the narrator hears the man's heart stop beating, he removes the bed and checks to make sure the old man is dead. Then, he dismembers the body parts. He cuts on head, arms and legs. He then takes up three planks from the floor of the chamber and deposits all between the scantlings. He replaced the board then after. There remains nothing to wash out. Such nature crime, thus, is strange and unusual.

8. 2073 SET D Q. NO. 2A

Describe the situation which encouraged them to kill the old man? [3]

- The role of the unusual sound is important in the story "The Tell-Tale Heart ". This Sound encourages the narrator first to commit crime then to confess it. An eighth night, the narrator enters into the old mania room with his lantern. When his thumb slips and falls in the tin of the lantern, the old man wakes up on his bed. The narrator directs the lantern in the spot of his eyes and sees it clearly. He hears at the time a dull, low, quick, sound such as a watch makes when enveloped in the cotton. This sound encourages his fury, the way the beating of the drum encourages the soldiers of war. He is encouraged for the murder. Even if the narrator stops there, the hellish tattoo of the heart increases. It grows quicker and louder. At the dead hour of the night, this uncontrollable terror on the sound encourages the narrator to commit crime/murder. Thinking the heart must burst, the neighbor must listen, the narrator murders the man. Similarly the next time encourage him to confess his murder. But

this time the narrator mistakes his own heart for the old, murdered man's heart. After completing his job, he starts talking to the cop, who has come there for the investigation. He fancies a ringing in his ear. He wants to get rid but fails. He wants policemen to go but they don't. The sound grows louder, clearer and louder again. The low dull sound again haunts him. He walks, talks more fluently, steps on to the floor but all remains in vain. When it's too much he confesses the murder. The sound in this way incites him to commit a murder and the same sound encourages him to reveal his crime.

9. 2072 PARTIAL SET A Q. NO. 2A

Why couldn't the narrator kill the Old Man for seven nights? [3]

- The narrator of the story, "The Tell- Tale Heart" is a boy. He used to live in the old man's house. He had nothing to do with the old man but the only thing that irritated the boy was his eyes. To get rid of the eye like that of the vulture with a pale film over it, he went to the old man's room continuously for seven days. He went with a torch light thinking that he would see the eye of the old man. But every night he went at midnight and opened the door and lantern, he found the man asleep with his eyes closed. The boy, therefore, returned every night. He wanted to see the eye of the old man which could really vex him. Since he loves the old man he couldn't kill him if he didn't see his eyes. It was the eye, not the old man, who he was after. His efforts remained unsuccessful for seven nights as the old man didn't open his eyes and returned for seven nights because he didn't see what he wanted to see: old man's vulturous eye.

10. 2072 PARTIAL SET B Q. NO. 2A

Why were the efforts of the narrator to kill the old man unsuccessful for seven nights?

- Please refer to **2074 SET A Q. NO. 2F**

11. 2071 SUPP Q. NO. 12F

Write the summary of the story "The Tell-Tale Heart" in a short paragraph. [3]

- The narrator claims that he is not mad as he could hear things in heaven, earth and hell. The boy used to love the man very much but the only thing that irritated him was his eyes. To end the consequences, he went to the old man's room continuously for seven days. As he could not see the eyes of the man returned each time he went to see his eyes. On the eighth night, he as usual went there with a torch. He did everything stealthy and cautiously. Despite this, he happened to touch the tin fastening, which dropped and disturbed the sleep of the man and woke him up. With the help of the lantern he saw the eyes and he grew angry. He then jumped towards the man, dragged the man and pressed his neck in the bed. At last, he dismembered the old man's dead body and put it under the plank. After it, he cleaned the place spotlessly. It was already four when he finished the task. At four, the three policemen appeared and rang the bell. He cordially asked them to sit on the chair, which he had kept there. He sat there just over the plank whereas the policeman continued talking with a smiling face. The boy, at the same time, heard a sound coming from beneath. He desired to reduce the loudness of the sound. For this purpose, he spoke louder; though it didn't do any good. He felt the sound growing; he felt the policemen's smile as the smile of mockery. It became unbearable for him to keep the reality secret. He thought it better to confess than to hide. Eventually he confessed the crime.

12. 2071 PARTIAL SET A Q. NO. 12 E

Describe the nature of the murderer. [3]

- Please refer to **2074 SET B Q. NO. 2B**

13. 2070 SUPP SET A Q. NO. 12 E

Describe the situation and the sound which incited the narrator to commit crime, at first and to confess at the end of the story. [3]

- Please refer to **2073 SET D Q. NO. 2A**

14. 2070 SUPP SET B Q. NO. 12 D

Would you call the narrator mad? Give reasons for your answer. •

- Yes. The narrator seems to be overpowered by his madness. The madness manifests in different places in the story, "The Tell-Tale Heart". First, he had murdered an innocent old man. He has neither insulted him or has wronged him which he states in the story. Killing an innocent old man is not an act of a wise man. Second, he claims that he knows the happenings of both heaven and hell. A sane person never makes such an imaginary claim. He repeats again and again that he is not mad. If one says same thing again and again, we lose the trust to such person. Fourth, generally a man of wit doesn't hold his patience up to seven long nights; he rather thinks of the alternatives to see the old man's eyes. Again, the narrator claims that he has over acuteness of the senses. A mad man is one whose sense is not acute but over acute. Sixth, the narrator doesn't identify that he has a heartbeat. He claims the sound to the sound of a dead man's heart. He doesn't view out how his own heart betrays him. Lastly, he confesses his crime. Generally, a wise man after the murder wants to escape the life of prison. He opens something that he wants to hide.

15. 2070 SET D Q. NO 12C

Why does the narrator kill the man? How does he feel after the murder?

- Please refer to **2076 PARTIAL E Q. NO. 2F**

16. 2069 Q. NO. 12F

How was the narrator betrayed by his own heart? Discuss.

- Please refer to **2075 SET C Q. NO. 2**

17. 2068 Q. NO. 12F

Would you call the narrator mad? Give reasons for your answer. [3]

- Please refer to **2070 SUPP SET B Q. NO. 12 D**

18. 2066 Q. NO. 12 E

Would you call the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" mad? Give reasons for your answer. [3]

- Please refer to 2070 **SUPP SET B Q.NO. 12 D**

19. 2066 (PARTIAL) Q. NO. 12F

Why does the narrator confess his guilt? [3]

- The narrator at the end of the story confesses his guilt and says "Villains! I admit the deed!" He admits with a realization that he has committed a serious crime. He actually confessed his crime scene his heart didn't give him comfort. The sound of the heart grows louder and clearer to him. The more he tries to ignore, the more distinct it appears to be. Being conscious of the crime and its consequences, the narrator confesses it. Though late, he has a sense of realization of his guilt. He has his heart repenting his deeds. The Bible preaches that God forgives those who realize their guilt and confess it. He, perhaps, is also governed by this Christian philosophy of crime and confession. The narrator's mind loses its control the time his heart empowers him. He commits this heinous crime. Similarly, the heart forces him towards confession when he was plotting the concealment. Thus, the narrator with a sense of realization and acceptance of his crime confesses the guilt at the end of the story.

20. 2065 Q. NO. 12

What made the narrator confess his crime? [3]

- Please refer to **2066 (PARTIAL) Q. NO. 12F**

21. 2064 Q. NO. 12 D

Describe the scene when the narrator killed the old man.[3]

- It was pitch dark at about midnight when the narrator killed the old man. The room had been plunged into thick darkness with closed shutters. The narrator wanted to open the lantern entering his room to see his eyes; his thumb slipped and fell upon the tin of the lantern. The old man sprang up on the bed. But the narrator kept still and quiet. Standing almost an hour in the room, he heard a groan of pain. The narrator knew that the old man was still awake on the bed. After a long wait, he opened the lantern slowly and a thin ray of the light that came out from the little crevice of the lantern fell upon the old man's eyes. He didn't breathe but held the lantern motionless. The old man's heart grew louder and clearer. It was the dead of the night. There was dreadful silence in the house. Amid such silence, he heard the heart louder: so louder that it was about to burst. Thinking that the neighbor would hear the sound he threw off the lantern with a loud yell and leaped into the room. He dragged the man to the floor and pulled the heavy bed over him. He killed him. He smiled. The sound of man's heart went on beating.

22. 2062. Q. NO. 12F

What made the narrator confess his crime?

- Please refer to **2066 (PARTIAL) Q. NO. 12F**

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

23. 2076 PARTIAL D Q. NO. 3A

Why does the narrator kill the old man? What makes does he confess the crime at the end?

- The narrator in the story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" kills the old man. He says it is all because he wants to get rid of the old man's eyes. The narrator also reveals that the old man's vulture's eye with a pale film over it makes him very angry. Though the old man has not insulted him, has not done any wrong to

him and neither does he have any greed for his property, the narrator doesn't like the old man's eyes. Thus, despite his love to the old man, the narrator kills him so as to be free from the pale vulture eyes of the old man. To answer the next part of the question, I would say yes. The narrator seems to be overpowered by his morbidity. The madness manifests in different places in the story, "The Tell-Tale Heart". First, he had murdered an innocent old man. He has neither insulted him or has wronged him which he states in the story. Killing an innocent old man is not an act of a wise man. Second, he claims that he knows the happenings of both heaven and hell. A sane person never makes such an imaginary claim. He repeats again and again that he is not mad. If one says the same thing again and again, we lose trust in such a person. Fourth, generally a man of wit doesn't hold his patience up to seven long nights; he rather thinks of the alternatives to see the old man's eyes. Again, the narrator claims that he has an acute sense of the senses. A mad man is one whose sense is not acute but over acute. Sixth, the narrator doesn't identify that he has a heartbeat. He claims the sound to be the sound of a dead man's heart. He doesn't view out how his own heart betrays him. Lastly, he confesses his crime. Generally, a wise man after the murder wants to escape the life of prison. He opens something that he wants to hide. In this way, the narrator gives the reason of murder he committed, though the logic he produce to sounds humorous. One thing is that it is very dirty to believe in logic and the reason he gives might give be many reasons. One reason can be insanity. Thus his killing and his madness has a connection. The troubled narrator after the murderer is found to be betrayed by his own heart. On the eighth night, the narrator murdered the old man. He dismembered the parts after he killed the man and concealed them under the wooden planks. By the time he finished his work, the policemen came for investigation. Convinced by the narrator, they started conversing with him. Meanwhile, the narrator heard the sound. The sound became louder and louder and clearer. I heard a distinct sound of the old man's heart beat. But, since the murdered man's heart couldn't beat the narrator mistook his own heart beat for the old man's. Being nervous and filled with the sense of remorse and guilt, he confessed the truth. This is all because his heart betrayed him. He could hide the cold murder from all other but not his own heart. His heart did not accompany him. It betrayed the narrator by telling the truth that he killed the innocent old man and concealed his dead body under the planks

24. 2075 PARTIAL E Q. NO. 13A

Why does the narrator develop hatred for man? Would you call the narrator mad? Give reasons for your answer. [10]

- E. A. Poe's narrator develops the intensity against the old man in his story, "The Tell-Tale Heart". The implicit reasons behind this can be an explicit reason mentioned in the story is the old eye. He states in the story that the old man's vulture-like eye vexes him much. Though the old man has not insulted him, has not done any wrong to him and neither does he have any greed for his property, the narrator doesn't like the old man's eyes. Thus, despite his love to the old man, the narrator kills him with hatred so as to be free from the pale vulture eyes of the old man. This unusual sense of hatred the narrator has shown against the old man forces us to question if he is mad. The most debated question, thus, is related to the narrator's mental state. Poe has left all to his readers. He makes them think about whether he is mad. Whatever the arguments, I would call him a mad man. There are some reasons: The narrator seems to be overpowered by his morbidity. The madness manifests in different places in the story, "The Tell-Tale Heart". First, he had murdered an innocent old man. He has neither insulted him or has wronged him, which he states in the story. Killing an innocent old man is not an act of a wise man. Second, he claims that he knows the happenings of both heaven and hell. A sane person never makes such an imaginary claim. He repeats again and again that he is not mad. If one says the same thing again and again, we lose the trust of such a person. Fourth, generally a man of wit doesn't hold his patience up to seven long nights; he rather thinks of the alternatives to see the old man's eyes. Again, the narrator claims that he has over acuteness of the sense. A mad man is one whose sense is not acute but over acute. Sixth, the narrator doesn't identify that he has a heartbeat. He claims the sound to be the sound of a dead man's heart. He doesn't see how his own heart betrays him. Lastly, he confesses his crime. Generally, a wise man after the murder wants to escape the life of prison. He but opens something that he wants to hide. Thus, the mysterious story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" narrates the crime committed by a mad man. Throughout the story he makes a great effort to justify his sanity but fails when he gives the reason for the killing, the intense hatred against the old man, and when he admits the truth without knowing the fact that the sound he listened was the sound of his own heart.

25. 2073 SUPP Q. NO. 3B

In "The Tell-Tale Heart", Edgar Allan Poe makes the narrator unfold the minute details one after another. Discuss how he does it and what is the impact on his readers? [10]

- The narrator, in the story, 'The Tell-Tale Heart', by Edgar Allen Poe, unfolds the minute details of his murder in a sequence. He opens the story by claiming that he is nervous but not mad. He says that he is going to tell a story in which he will defend his sanity yet confess to having killed an old man. His motivation was neither passion nor desire for money, but rather a fear of the man's pale blue eyes. Again, he insists that he is not crazy because his cool and measured actions, though criminal, are not those of a mad man. Every night, he went to the old man's apartment and secretly observed the man sleeping. In the morning, he would behave as if everything were normal. After a week of this activity, the narrator decides, somewhat randomly, that the time is right to actually kill the old man. When the narrator arrives late on the eighth night, though, the old man wakes up and cries out. The narrator remains still, talking the old man as he sits awake and frightened. The narrator understands how frightened the old man is, having also experienced the lonely terrors of the night. Soon, the narrator hears a dull pounding that he interprets as the old man's terrified heartbeat. Worried that a neighbor might hear the loud thumping, he attacks and kills the old man. He then dismembers the body and hides the pieces below the floorboards in the bedroom. He is careful not to leave even a drop of blood on the floor. As he finishes his job, a clock strikes the hour of four. At the same time, the narrator hears a knock at the street door. The police have arrived, having been called by a neighbor who heard the old man shriek. The narrator is careful to be chatty and to appear normal. He leads the officers all over the house without acting suspiciously. At the height of his bravado, he even brings them into the old man's bedroom to sit down and talk at the scene of the crime. The policemen do not suspect a thing. The narrator is comfortable until he starts to hear a low thumping sound. He recognizes the low sound as the heart of the old man, pounding away beneath the floorboards. He panics, believing that the policemen must also hear the sound and know his guilt. Driven mad by the idea that they are mocking his agony with their pleasant chatter, he confesses to the crime and shrieks at the men to rip up the floorboards. This storytelling has a great impact on the readers. They are both surprised and convinced with his view. Some of the readers might take him as a man of surprise while others might have been convinced that his feelings are sensible. We might also find him as the man of patience and courage. But since he has killed an innocent man, we can't stop hating him.

26. 2071 SET D Q. NO. 13 A

Why does the narrator kill the old man? Would you call the narrator mad? Provide appropriate reasons to your answer? (10)

- Please refer to **2076 PARTIAL D Q. NO. 3A**

27. 2059 Q. NO. 3 B

Why does the narrator develop intense hatred against the old man? Would you call the narrator mad? Give reasons for your answer. [10]

- Please refer to **2075 PARTIAL E Q. NO. 13A**

PARBIN KANDEL