

Answer Keys

Law and Order: **Edgar Allan Poe**

“The Tell-Tale Heart”

1. Re-read the first paragraph of "The Tell-Tale Heart." What does it tell us about the narrator? What later event does it foreshadow?

The narrator admits to being nervous. He says his senses are very keen, especially his hearing, which is so keen that he hears things in heaven and hell. This tells us he doesn't think he is crazy, and it suggests strongly that he is hallucinating. This foreshadows his later hallucination of the beating heart.

2. Look through the story and find 4 times when the narrator insists he is not mad. How does he seem to define madness?

The narrator insists he is not mad in paragraphs 1, 3, 10, and 12. He seems to define madness as dull senses, foolishness, or not paying careful attention to details.

3. Is the reader meant to agree with the narrator when he says he is not mad? How do you know?

Once the narrator admits to hearing things in heaven and in hell in paragraph 1, the reader knows he is hallucinating and that his observations may not be accurate.

4. In paragraph 18 the narrator says the officers "chatted pleasantly, and smiled." Do you think the officers would agree with this description? If you were an officer on a call at 4 A.M., listening to this narrator, what might you be thinking?

The fact that the officers were willing to sit down and chat with a stranger at 4 in the morning suggests that they already suspected him, especially since he invited them to sit in an upstairs bedroom instead of in the living room. By the time he started talking loudly and making a lot of noise, the officers were probably just waiting for enough evidence to arrest him.

5. List two things that would be different if this story had been told by the murder victim, speaking from the afterlife.

Answers will vary. Students might mention that the old man seemed to trust the narrator; otherwise, he would have fired him. They might also mention his indecision, not knowing what to do when he heard the noise and saw the light from the doorway.

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“The Cask of Amontillado”

1. Re-read the first paragraph of "The Cask of Amontillado." What does the narrator think of himself? To whom might he be speaking?

The narrator sees himself as a victim who deserves revenge. He mentions that he is speaking to someone who knows “the nature of [his] soul.” This could be someone close to him, a wife, a son, a close friend, or a priest. The final paragraph says that the incident happened 50 years earlier, so this could be a deathbed confession. It might also be a deathbed boast.

2. The narrator tells us that he had dealt with "injuries" and finally even an "insult" from Fortunato. What examples can you find in the story to support the narrator's perception that Fortunato really is so rude?

Fortunato insults Luchresi several times. He also makes a point of saying that Montresor is not “of the brotherhood,” which is a kind of one-upping him. He does not, however, seem to be a monster. He acts in the way many people act from time to time. Montresor may be overreacting.

3. In paragraph 42, Montresor says he drinks to Fortunato's "long life." Now that you have read the whole story, what double meaning can you understand?

Montresor knows he is going to bury Fortunato alive, so he hopes Fortunato will suffer a long time before he dies.

4. Re-read the final paragraph. Does Montresor feel any remorse for his actions? Explain your answer.

Answers will vary. Some students may say that leaving the scene undisturbed for 50 years shows no remorse, and Montresor never says that he is sorry. Other students may point to “my heart grew sick” as an expression of remorse, despite the claim that it was caused by the dampness. They may also point to his haste to finish the job.

5. List two ways this story would be different if it were told by Fortunato, waiting to die in the crypt.

Answers will vary, depending on the student's interpretation of Fortunato.