

**LEVEL Z2**

Grades

5 and above

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# The Raven

Author: Edgar Allan Poe  
Illustrator: Mariano Epelbaum

**Book Summary**

*The Raven* is a classic American poem famous for its dark themes, foreboding tone, and clever rhythms and rhymes. The eighteen stanzas take the reader on a journey through the troubled mind of the poem's narrator, a young man who sits alone in his study, depressed and agonizing over the loss of his beloved Lenore. Suddenly, a raven flies into the room. A strange conversation between man and bird ensues, bringing ominous implications for the increasingly distraught narrator.

**Reading Strategy: Visualization**

**Comprehension Skill: Make Inferences / Draw Conclusions**

**Level Z2**

**Fiction/Poetry • 1 Part**

## How to Use the Lesson Plan

This lesson plan is designed to be used with Reading A–Z’s retelling of *The Raven*. Assign and teach the book as a whole-class lesson. Or assign it to a reading group and teach all or part of the lesson in a small-group setting. Worksheets support the learning objectives of the lesson. Discussion cards can be used to set up literature circles. A culminating comprehension quiz is included and covers the entire poem.

### About the Lesson

#### Targeted Reading Strategy

- Visualize

#### Objectives

- Use the reading strategy of visualizing to understand the poem
- Make inferences and draw conclusions about the text
- Identify and use adjectives
- Identify and understand the use of onomatopoeia
- Recognize and understand the use of mood

#### Materials

- Book: *The Raven* (copy for each student or group)
- Chalkboard or dry-erase board
- Recorded version of the text (optional)
- Student notebooks
- Visualize, make inferences / draw conclusions, adjectives worksheets

## Before Reading

### Build Background

- Explain to students that *The Raven* is a poem that explores the darker side of the human mind and how tragic events can affect a person’s life. Point out that because the poem was written over 170 years ago and is also narrated by a distraught man, the language of the poem is highly emotional and frenetic.
- Explain to students that an unreliable narrator is one that readers can’t fully trust for a variety of reasons, such as the belief that the narrator is purposely lying, withholding information, or misunderstanding the situation. Have students work in small groups to brainstorm a list of such characters from other books, films, or television shows. Discuss as a class the effect an unreliable narrator can have on a story. Encourage students to consider the narrator of this poem as they read, and determine whether they find him reliable or unreliable.

### Introduce the Book

- Distribute copies of *The Raven*. Have students look at the cover art and read the short biography of Edgar Allan Poe. On the basis of what they have read, ask students to make predictions about what the mood and atmosphere of the poem might be. Encourage them to write down their ideas and review their predictions as they read.

### Introduce the Reading Strategy: *Visualize*

- Review with students that one way to understand what happens in any work of fiction is to visualize or picture in your mind, the characters, setting, and events that are a part of the story or poem.
- Remind students that when you visualize, you are making a movie of the poem or story in your mind. Discuss with students how you are using the words, descriptions, and details to create mental images of the action in order to deepen your understanding of the text.
- Read aloud the first stanza of *The Raven* to model visualization for students. As you read, draw images on the board that represent the visualizations you are making.

- After reading the stanza, discuss with students the details of what you were visualizing as you read the words. Share images that sprung up in your mind as you read the text. Record on the board words or additional images that particularly stood out.
- Next, read the second stanza of *The Raven* aloud to students. Ask them to close their eyes as you read and visualize what is happening in the text. When you are finished reading, have students share their visualizations with a partner and identify the specific words or phrases that helped conjure strong mental images.
- Introduce and explain the visualize worksheet. Ask students to record their visualizations as they read. Ask them to stop periodically, at least once every six stanzas, and describe or draw a visualization they made as they read.
- Encourage students to use other reading strategies in addition to visualizing. For tips on additional reading strategies, go to [www.readinga-z.com/comprehension/](http://www.readinga-z.com/comprehension/), click on the More About Comprehension link, and then click on the Reading Strategies tab.

### Introduce the Comprehension Skill: *Make Inferences / Draw Conclusions*

- Write the following question on the board: *What are you doing when you make an inference or draw a conclusion?* Give students two minutes to write their answers on a separate sheet of paper, and then have them share with a partner.
- Remind students that authors don't always directly state what a character thinks or feels. Remind students that when you make an inference or draw a conclusion, you are using clues from the story in addition to your own experience to decide what is happening. Point out that sometimes this is called reading between the lines.
- Read aloud the second stanza of the poem, and model for students how to make inferences about information not shared, such as how Lenore was connected to the narrator and what has happened to her. Share the clues from the text and your personal experience that were used to draw these conclusions. Then, read aloud the third stanza and ask students to listen for details about how the narrator is feeling. Have students work in groups to discuss why the narrator is filled with fantastic terrors, and have them share their conclusions with the rest of the class, along with the clues and personal experience they used to support these inferences.

- Explain to students that as they read *The Raven* they will need to make inferences and draw conclusions about what is going on in the poem and in the mind of the narrator.

### Introduce the Vocabulary

- Explain to students that *The Raven* contains figurative language along with other literary devices and words that will be unfamiliar. Point out how Poe's language conjures a dark and dreary atmosphere.
- Remind students that, as *The Raven* was written long ago, there are also words that are generally not in use today. Explain to students that additionally, as the narrator of the poem is an educated man, he also uses advanced or academic vocabulary.
- Remind students that they can determine the meaning of unknown words by using context clues, examining affixes and base words, rereading with synonyms, and referring to a dictionary when these strategies don't help.
- Point out to students that they can also use the glossary when they encounter unknown words. Encourage them to go back and reread the text containing the unknown words to make sure they fully understand the words in context. Remind students that only boldface words are in the glossary.

### Set the Purpose

- Explain to students that their purpose in reading *The Raven* is to answer the following focus question: *What do the raven and its only word mean to the narrator?* To accomplish this purpose, explain that students will use the reading strategy of visualization as well other comprehension skills, in particular making inferences and drawing conclusions.
- Remind students that a general purpose of all fiction, including poetry, is entertainment. Point out that this poem, with its creepy, gothic atmosphere, bizarre narrator, and relentless rhythms and rhymes is one of Poe's most popular works and has been so for nearly two centuries.



## During Reading

### Student Reading

- **Guide the reading:** While reading, periodically stop to have students share what they are visualizing. Remind them that visualizing means creating their own personal mental images that help them understand what is happening in the text.
- Periodically stop and have students work in groups or with a partner to make inferences and draw conclusions about what is happening to the narrator in the poem.
- Explain that *The Raven* contains eighteen stanzas, each one containing eleven lines. Review with students the meaning of a *stanza* and a *line* in poetry. Remind students that a *rhyme scheme* describes how the author chose to organize the *rhyme* words in a poem. Guide students in identifying the rhyme scheme for this poem, and ensure that they also find the internal rhymes in each line. Discuss with students how Poe created rhythm with the line and stanza structures and the rhyme element.
- Assign the entire poem to all students or divide the class into small groups and have them work on the poem together.

## Check for Understanding Section by Section

### Stanzas 1 through 6

- **Summary:** The beginning of the poem finds the narrator alone in his room around midnight on a dreary December evening. He's napping in a chair, half asleep and half awake, mourning the loss of a woman named Lenore, whom he loved and who has died. As he pours over his books and tries to forget his sorrow, he hears, or thinks he hears, someone knocking on his door. He gets up to investigate, opens the door, but finds that there is no one there, just the darkness. He whispers into the darkness, "Lenore," and hears the name echo back to him. He turns to go back to his room, a little shaken from the experience, when he hears another sound coming from outside his window. The sixth stanza ends as the narrator goes to the window to investigate.

- **Comprehension (Make Inferences / Draw Conclusions):** Remind students what it means to make an inference or draw a conclusion. Pose the following scenario to students: *Pretend that you go to bed one cold, winter evening. When you awake the following morning, everything outside is blanketed in snow. What can you infer happened during the night while you were asleep?* Have students discuss their answer with a partner, and confirm that they can infer that it snowed during the night. Introduce and explain the make inferences / draw conclusions worksheet. Guide students in filling out one row on the worksheet. Prompt students with questions such as the following: *What kind of mood is the narrator in? What is he thinking and feeling? In stanza five, the narrator answers his door and says, "Lenore." Why is this an odd thing to do? What does this action tell you about his state of mind?* Ask students to continue recording their inferences and conclusions as they read.
- **Figurative Language (Alliteration):** Remind students that alliteration is a literary device that uses words that begin with the same or nearly the same sound. Write on the board a few tongue twisters, such as the following: *Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.* Have students call out the alliterative sound, and invite volunteers to come to the board and underline the letters that create alliteration in each one. Have students underline examples of alliteration from this first six stanzas of the poem and share their work with a partner. Discuss with students how the use of alliteration helps to create a mood and provides insight into the mind of the narrator. Encourage students to reread the first six stanzas of the poem aloud to each other so they can get a stronger sense of how powerful the poem is when recited aloud and heard, as opposed to simply being read.

### Stanzas 7 through 12

- **Summary:** The narrator opens his window. As soon as he does, a raven steps into his room and flies up onto a bust of Pallas, which is just above the door. The raven is silent and still. Although the narrator is in a gloomy mood, he is slightly amused by the appearance of the bird and asks it its name. The raven replies, "Nevermore." At first, the narrator thinks that this is just a coincidence and that the raven's name is not actually Nevermore. The narrator continues to speak, mostly to himself, and expresses that the bird, like his hopes and people in his life, will be gone in the morning. To this the raven replies, "Nevermore." This really



frightens the narrator, and he is no longer amused by the raven's presence. At first, he thinks that *nevermore* is the only word the raven can speak, but by the end of the twelfth stanza, the narrator begins to believe that the raven and his utterances have a deeper and more sinister meaning.

- **Explanation:** The bust of Pallas has particular significance in *The Raven* and can be interpreted in primarily two ways. The bust is of Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. One interpretation is that Poe's placement of the raven on this bust indicates that the raven is actually smarter and wiser than any ordinary bird and that his utterances are meaningful. Another interpretation is that the raven's choice of perch is random and insignificant. It is the narrator who, in his depressed and agitated state of mind, projects meaning and powers onto the bird that simply do not exist.
- **Comprehension (Analyze Setting):** Remind students that the setting identifies the time and place of a narrative. Have students work with a partner to identify the setting of the poem, and ask them to note particular details from the poem that evoke the setting in their mental visualizations. Invite volunteers to share their ideas with the rest of the class, and record on the board details about the setting. Discuss with students the importance of the setting and how it contributes to the overall mood of the poem. Have students work in groups to consider how the poem would be different if the setting were changed. Discuss with the class how the mood of the poem would be affected by a change in setting.
- **Figurative Language (Allusion):** Remind students that an allusion is a literary device whereby an author makes a subtle but deliberate reference to a piece of art, work of literature, important person or place, or other thing of cultural significance. In this part of the poem, the raven perches on the bust of Pallas. Explain to students the background on the bust of Pallas and ask them to give a thumbs-up signal if they agree that this is an example of allusion. Have students work in groups to discuss why Poe chose to have the raven land on this specific object. Then have student groups look through the stanzas they have already read to identify other examples of allusions.



## Stanzas 13 through 18

- **Summary:** The narrator now believes that he is being deliberately tormented by the raven. He feels as if the menacing bird's eyes are burning a hole into his soul. He begins to ask the raven a series of fevered questions, the answers to which drive him further and further into despair. First, he asks the raven if he will ever be able to forget Lenore and be left in peace. The raven replies, "Nevermore." Next, he asks the raven if there is anything he can do to rid himself of his all-consuming sorrow for Lenore. The raven replies, "Nevermore." The narrator asks the raven if he will get to see Lenore in the afterlife after he dies. Again, "Nevermore." Now, in a complete frenzy, the narrator demands that the bird leave him alone and fly away, but the raven only offers the same response and remains where it is. The narrator collapses onto the floor of his room, his despair complete. His final words to us are that he is nothing more than a shadow and he will remain in sorrow forever.
- **Explanation:** The balm of Gilead is a biblical reference, mentioned in the book of Jeremiah. It was a kind of fragrant oil that had healing properties. It was also associated with the healing of broken hearts, appropriate to the narrator's lamenting on Lenore.
- **Comprehension (Analyze Character):** Ask students to pretend that they actually know the narrator of *The Raven* and have to introduce him to their friends. Have them work with a partner to figure out what they will tell their friends about the narrator as an introduction. Remind them that describing a character involves all his character traits, including how he looks, feels, and behaves. Have them write down their description, and then call on students to read it aloud to the rest of the class.
- **Figurative Language (Repetition and Rhyme):** Explain to students that Poe uses both repetition and rhyme throughout *The Raven* to draw the reader into the mind of the narrator. Have students go through this section of the poem and underline instances of rhyme and repetition. Encourage them to look for repetition of words and sounds. Call on students to share something they underlined with the rest of the class. Then, have them share some of their favorite lines. Point out that many commentators have said that these elements of the poem make it somewhat hypnotic, almost as if Poe is casting a spell on the reader. Have students discuss with a partner whether they agree that these elements create that effect, or what other effect they felt it created.

- **Vocabulary:** *Aidenn, balm, beguiling, censer, countenance, dirges, discourse, divining, entreating, implore, mien, nepenthe, obeisance, ominous, pallid, placid, Plutonian, prophet, quaff, respite, seraphim, surcease, thereat, yore*

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## After Reading

### Reflect on the Reading Strategy

- Have students share with a partner or with the class the visualizations they recorded on the visualize worksheet as they read. Discuss with students how visualizing the poem helped them to understand and better remember what they read.
- **Independent practice:** Have students work in small groups or with a partner to create one unique illustration for each part of the poem. Invite volunteers to share their illustrations with the rest of the class.

### Reflect on the Comprehension Skill

- Have students work in groups to share their make inferences / draw conclusions worksheets and discuss the conclusions they made and what details they used to come to each conclusion, whether from the text or their own experience. Call on student groups to share their inferences and identify clues from the story that support them.
- **Independent practice:** Have students complete the make inferences / draw conclusions worksheet by answering the following question on the other side of the worksheet: *Think carefully about the questions that the narrator asks the raven. What can be inferred about the narrator from the fact that he asks only questions to which the answer "Nevermore" makes sense?*

### Reflect on the Purpose

- Refer students back to the focus question: *What do the raven and its word mean to the narrator?* Have students work in groups to discuss their thoughts and explain why they drew their particular conclusions. Encourage them to provide evidence from the text to support their conclusions.

- Invite students to reflect on some of the themes of the poem, for example sadness, loss, and love. List some of these themes on the board. Have students work in groups to discuss how these themes are explored by and through the narrator of the poem.
- **Enduring Understanding:** In *The Raven*, we witness how powerful emotions can be. What experiences have you had in the past that brought with them strong emotional responses? How did you handle these feelings, and how were your choices different from the narrator's?

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## Build Skills

### Grammar and Mechanics: *Adjectives*

- Review or explain that adjectives are words or phrases that describe nouns. Discuss that adjectives can express color, texture, feelings, sound, and so on. Remind students that adjectives give more information about a noun.
- Have students review the first three stanzas of *The Raven* and ask them to locate and circle all of the adjectives. Next, have students discuss particular adjectives by asking them questions such as the following: *What is described as being silken and purple? What adjectives does the narrator use to describe Lenore? How does the narrator feel as he reads his books? What adjective describes the month of December?*
- Discuss with students how the adjectives in this poem help establish the setting and reinforce the mood and themes.
- **Check for understanding:** Have students work in pairs to locate and list the adjectives in stanzas four through six and identify the nouns they describe. Call on students to share an adjective they found and have other students provide the noun it describes.
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the adjectives worksheet. If time allows, discuss their answers.

**Word Work: Onomatopoeia**

- Explain to students that in *The Raven*, Poe uses *onomatopoeia*, or words that sound like the object or action they are associated with.
- Provide students with a few examples of onomatopoeia, such as *zip*, *splash*, *squirt*.
- Have students turn to the first stanza of *The Raven*. Ask them to follow along as you read aloud the following lines: *While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping, As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door*. Ask students to identify examples of onomatopoeia in these lines and tell how they know that these are examples onomatopoeia (*tapping*, *rapping*).
- Have students work in pairs to examine the third stanza of the poem, looking for more examples of onomatopoeia (*rustling*, *beating*). Have students work in groups to discuss how Poe's use of onomatopoeia contributes to the hypnotic, spell-like quality of the poem.
- **Independent Practice:** Have students work with a partner to find and underline examples of onomatopoeia throughout the poem (*muttered*, *murmured*, *flutter*, *croaking*, *tinkled*, *flitting*). Invite them to share the lines from the poem with the class, and have other students identify the onomatopoeia in each line. Then, discuss with the class how the poem would be different if Poe chose not to use this literary device.

**Literary Element: Mood**

- Read the entire poem aloud to the class, or play a recorded version of *The Raven* for students in its entirety.
- Ask students to listen carefully for the use of alliteration, repetition, and rhyme. Discuss with students how these literary elements create a particular mood for the poem. Remind students that a mood describes the feelings or emotions evoked in readers by a piece of writing. Guide students to a class consensus that the poem's mood is dark, unsettling, eerie, frightening, or other descriptions in that register.
- Explain to students that Poe used all of these elements to create a particular mood to draw readers into the tormented mind of the narrator.
- Have students work in groups to find particular details in the poem that evoke that mood and to analyze which literary elements are used. Invite volunteers to share what they found with the rest of class and explain how the literary elements help create the mood of the poem.

- **Independent Practice:** Have students volunteer to share a recitation of their favorite section of the poem with the rest of the class. Ask them to let the mood of the poem guide the manner in which they recite the lines.

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**Build Fluency****Independent Reading**

- Encourage students to read the poem independently. Additionally, partners can take turns reading parts of the poem to each other.

**Home Connection**

- Give students their copies to take home to read with parents, caregivers, siblings, or friends. Encourage them to share the reading strategy of visualization with family members.

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**Assessment****Monitor students to determine whether they can:**

- consistently visualize stanzas during discussion and on a worksheet
- effectively make inferences and draw conclusions during discussion and on a worksheet
- correctly use adjectives in discussion and on a worksheet
- accurately identify examples of onomatopoeia in text and during discussion
- accurately identify the literary elements that create a particular mood in a text during discussion

**Comprehension Check**

- Retelling rubric
- Book quiz