between the lines

A lesson written for every student in the room

FREE LESSON SAMPLER

Gothic short stories: Poe's narrator

How does Poe show that his narrator cannot be trusted?

Lesson 3 of 14 from the scheme of learning

Teacher notes, slides and student pages at all three levels

Written for the English national curriculum at Key Stage 3



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What is in this sampler

This is one complete lesson from our Gothic short stories scheme for Year 8. It comes exactly as it appears in the full scheme, so you can teach it next week and see how our lessons work.

Teacher notes	Timings with slide numbers, Do Now answers, the exploded quotation, the hinge question and what each answer tells you, the task at three levels, a model paragraph and notes on misconceptions and adapting the lesson (next pages).
Slides	The editable PowerPoint deck for Lesson 3, with teacher notes on every slide (separate file).
Student pages	The lesson's pages from the student booklet: one question, with the Securing, Strengthening and Soaring support side by side (at the end of this document).

How every lesson works

Know	Do Now from memory, vocabulary, then the reading. The five Do Now questions build on what students learned in Lessons 1 and 2 of the full scheme.
Apply	Explode one quotation together; a hinge question checks understanding.
Master	One shared question answered as a What–How–Why paragraph, with Securing, Strengthening and Soaring support; then a model paragraph and an exit ticket.

Three levels of support

Every student answers the same question in every lesson. What changes is the support on the page, so the whole class does the same lesson:

Securing	The most support: a word bank, a choice of quotations, a worked example and sentence starters.
Strengthening	Some support: prompts for What, How and Why, a planner and a checklist.
Soaring	The most challenge: a debatable statement, prompts to think further and an argument planner.

The names describe the support, never the student. The hinge question shows who might start where, and students move between levels from lesson to lesson.

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In the full scheme

- 14 lessons like this one, with editable slides and a teacher handbook (lesson notes, unit map, assessment guide and knowledge bank)
- A student booklet with every lesson and all three levels of support, plus the same lessons as one pack per level
- Six weeks of independent practice homework at three levels
- A checkpoint (Feedback Loop kit) with a whole-class feedback sheet and improvement tasks
- A two-part end-of-unit assessment with a teacher guide, band guidance and annotated models
- A catch-up sheet for every lesson, for students who missed it
- An inclusion guide: pre-teaching, SEND, EAL and pupil premium notes for every lesson

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Lesson 3: Poe's narrator

SEQUENCE 1: MAD, HAUNTED OR WARNED: POE, WELLS AND DICKENS · 60 MINUTES

How does Poe show that his narrator cannot be trusted?

By the end of the lesson, students can

- Explain what a first-person narrator and an unreliable narrator are
- Analyse how Poe uses questions, exclamations and repetition in the opening of the story
- Write a What–How–Why paragraph that follows how the narrator's argument changes across the extract

Lesson at a glance

Time	Phase	What happens	Slides
0–8	Know	Do Now: five quick questions on Lessons 1 and 2 and the Gothic conventions. Students self-check from the answer slide.	2–3
8–18	Know	Pre-teach "first-person narrator", "unreliable narrator", "insist" and "motive". Read the extract aloud while students follow and underline every word that shows the narrator arguing with a listener.	4–5
18–28	Apply	Explode the quotation together. Think aloud about the question and the word you, then students annotate their copy. Before you reveal any notes, students try the four empty boxes on the first explode slide, on their own or after you model one box.	6–7
28–33	Apply	Hinge question on mini-whiteboards. Use the answers to decide who starts on which level of support.	8–9
33–53	Master	Students write one What–How–Why paragraph using their level of support in the student booklet. Share the model paragraph in the last five minutes.	10–11
53–60	Master	Exit ticket. Collect and sort into three piles to plan the start of the next lesson.	12

Do Now answers

1	What does the narrator of 'The Tell-Tale Heart' hear at the end of the story?	A heart beating, which he thinks is the old man's
2	Which part of the old man does the narrator say he cannot bear?	His pale eye, which he calls a vulture's eye
3	Name two conventions of Gothic fiction.	Any two, such as lonely settings, night, suspense, the supernatural
4	Which writer edited the magazines Household Words and All the Year Round?	Charles Dickens
5	What does the word supernatural mean?	Beyond nature or science, such as a ghost

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Vocabulary

first-person narrator	a narrator who tells the story as I, from inside the events
unreliable narrator	a narrator whose version of events the reader cannot fully trust
insist	say something firmly, even when others doubt it
motive	the reason a person does something

Reading

‘The Tell-Tale Heart’: the narrator explains

The narrator speaks to a listener and argues that he is sane.

> True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.
>
> It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Edgar Allan Poe, ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ (1843)

Word help **acute**: sharp and very sensitive · **Hearken**: listen carefully · **conceived**: first thought of · **vulture**: a large bird that feeds on dead animals · **film**: a thin, cloudy layer

Explode the quotation

Method	Zoom in
A direct question to a listener. The narrator argues as if he were in court.	The second-person pronoun “you” points at a listener who is never named. The modal verb “will” makes the listener sound stubborn.

“why will you say that I am mad?”

Effect	Purpose
Readers doubt him at once, because a calm man would not need to protest so hard.	Poe lets the narrator tell his own story, so that readers must judge him for themselves.

Hinge question

Which detail best shows that we cannot trust the narrator?

A. He lives with an old man.

B. He says his hearing is very sharp.

C. He says he is calm and healthy while he explains why he decided to kill. **(the right answer)**

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What the answers tell you

A means the student is noticing a fact of the plot and not how the narrator speaks: ask what the narrator claims about himself. B means the student has chosen a claim that the story later supports: ask whether sharp hearing could be true and still leave the narrator unreliable. These students may start on Securing.

Why the answer is right

The narrator's claim to be calm does not match his plan to kill, so what he says and what he does disagree.

Master task

How does Poe show that his narrator cannot be trusted in this extract?

Securing the most support

Quotations to choose from

"very, very dreadfully nervous"

"How, then, am I mad?"

"I loved the old man."

Starters

Poe shows that the narrator cannot be trusted because he _____. He writes _____. The _____ (adjective) _____ (word class) _____ suggests _____. Readers start to _____ him, because _____. Poe wants readers to _____.

Strengthening some support

Prompts

What: Make a clear point about why the narrator cannot be trusted.

How: Choose a short quotation. Name the method (a question, an exclamation or repetition) and zoom in on one word. Then ask yourself: how does the narrator's argument change from the first paragraph to the second?

Why: What do readers start to think of him, and what does Poe want us to feel?

Soaring the most challenge

The debate

"The narrator frightens readers more by sounding calm than by sounding mad. How far do you agree?"

Write two paragraphs. In the second, give an alternative reading that begins with "Alternatively".

Model paragraph

What	Poe shows that the narrator cannot be trusted by letting him defend his sanity while he explains a plan to kill.
How	The narrator asks, "How, then, am I mad?", as if the answer were obvious. Yet he decides to kill a man he says he loved because of "a pale blue eye". The gentle past-tense verb "loved" sits beside the plan, so his words and his actions disagree. The second paragraph is calmer and more certain than the first, which makes it more disturbing.
Why	Readers start to doubt him at once, because a sane man would not argue so hard. Poe lets the narrator tell his own story so that readers must judge him, and the calm voice chills us more than a shout would.

Exit ticket

Poe's narrator cannot be trusted because…

Teacher notes

Subject knowledge

The extract is a speech for the defence. The narrator claims that sharper senses prove he is sane, then gives a motive that proves the opposite: a pale eye. A first-person narrator is unreliable when what he says does not match what the reader can see. Poe uses an exclamation ("Hearken!"), questions, repetition and a listener addressed as "you". The first paragraph argues for sanity, and the second explains the plan with growing confidence. Students who missed Lesson 2 need only know that he kills the old man and later confesses.

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