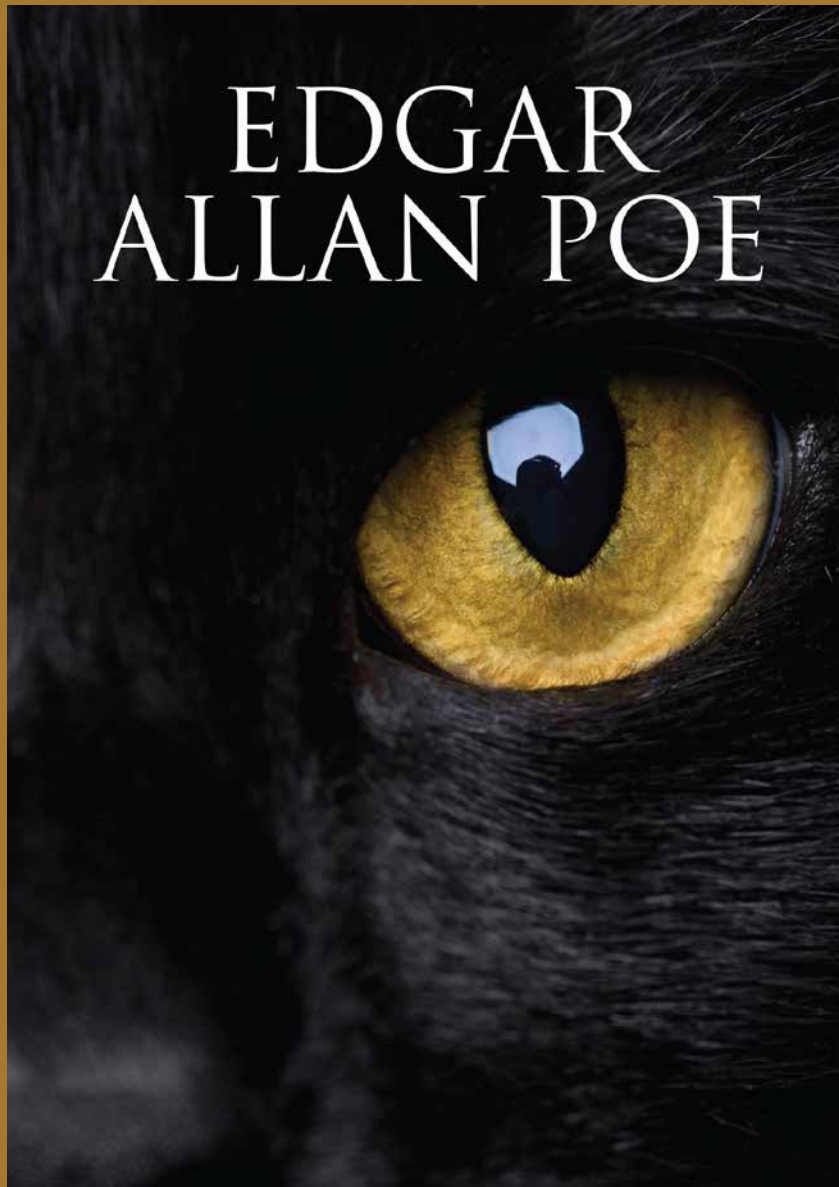


RETOLD CLASSICS

TEACHER RESOURCE  
FOR

EDGAR  
ALLAN POE



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Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM



### SPOTLIGHT ON VOCABULARY

Study the words and meanings shown in the box. Then complete each sentence below by writing the correct word on the line.

**acute**—a narrow angle less than 90 degrees  
**fatigue**—tiredness; weariness  
**ingenuity**—cleverness; ability to invent  
**intensity**—degree of power or fierceness  
**perceptible**—noticeable  
**perish**—to die or be destroyed

**relentlessly**—in a determined, unyielding way  
**severed**—cut or split  
**unique**—one of a kind; unusual  
**vapor**—gas produced when a solid or liquid is heated

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ that came from the science experiments made several students feel sick.
2. Jenna \_\_\_\_\_ her wrist on the glass while she was trying to help replace the window.
3. In the second half of the basketball game, Maya showed the \_\_\_\_\_ she felt after being sick and missing practice for a week.
4. While we were on the beach, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the sun made us all hot and tired.
5. The judges were impressed by the \_\_\_\_\_ of the participants in the Invention Expo.
6. It was difficult to get through the maze with the many \_\_\_\_\_ angles.
7. Sam worked \_\_\_\_\_ to get a good grade on his history final.
8. I assured Li that the spot on her prom dress was barely \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Unfortunately, most of the animals in the rain forest will \_\_\_\_\_ when the trees are cut down.
10. The bird was so \_\_\_\_\_ that it was the most popular exhibit at the fair.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

# THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM



## SETTING THE STAGE

These questions will help you get ready to read “The Pit and the Pendulum.” Prepare to discuss the questions by jotting down answers on the lines.

1. The narrator of the story has a terrifying experience that seems like a “living nightmare.” In fact, he is tortured. And, at one point, he even longs for death. What is torture? Write your definition here. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. The narrator is tortured both physically and mentally. Give some examples of what you think would be physical torture and what might be mental torture.

Physical torture	Mental torture
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3. Which do you think would be worse—physical torture or mental torture? Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

As you read, compare your answers with what happens in the story. Are your examples of torture milder or worse than the tortures in the story? At the end of the story, see if you have changed your opinion about what the worst kind of torture is.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM



### IT HAPPENED LIKE THIS

Write the letter of the best answer on the line.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The feature the prisoner remembers about the judges who sentenced him is
- their kind eyes.
  - their fingers pointing at him.
  - their white lips forming the words of the sentence.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. One fuzzy memory the prisoner can recall of his time before entering the dungeon is
- tall, shadowy figures carrying him in a long descent.
  - drinking a potion from a silver cup.
  - being lifted by some mechanism high above the ground.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. At first the prisoner does not want to look at his surroundings because
- he is afraid to look at horrible things.
  - he knows he will see harmful objects.
  - he is frightened that there will be nothing to see.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. When the prisoner tries to find out how large his dungeon is, he uses
- the knife from his pocket.
  - bread crumbs he is given.
  - the hem from his robe.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. When the prisoner falls to the floor, he discovers that
- he has broken his leg.
  - although his chin rests on the floor, the upper part of his head touches nothing.
  - a trapdoor is hidden on the floor of the prison.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. When the prisoner awakens from his drug-induced sleep, he
- calls out to the other prisoners in the cells beside his.
  - eats the generous meal left by his bed.
  - sees that the cell walls are painted with frightful images.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Since the prisoner has not fallen into the abyss, the monks decide to torture him with
- the monotonous sound of a pendulum.
  - a steel blade attached to a pendulum.
  - a noose attached to a pendulum.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The man is most fearful of the
- rats.
  - pit.
  - pendulum.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The man frees himself from the pendulum by
- using the rats.
  - using the robe that is given to him.
  - using his cup to hit a button on the wall.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The man is saved from his final fall into the abyss by
- the judges.
  - the Inquisition.
  - the French army.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM



### VOCABULARY REVIEW

These sentences are taken from the story. Circle the answer that comes closest in meaning to each word in **dark type**.

1. "They were thin from the **intensity** of being held in an expression of firmness."  
a. power                      b. greediness                      c. weakness
2. "I now knew what death had been prepared for me by the **ingenuity** of those monkish torturers."  
a. evil minds                      b. cleverness                      c. curiosity
3. "My **fatigue** was so great that I remained there."  
a. exhaustion                      b. emotions                      c. agony
4. "At the same time my forehead seemed bathed by a clammy **vapor**."  
a. fungus                      b. covering                      c. moisture
5. "I decided to **perish** there rather than risk the terrors of the pits."  
a. live                      b. remain                      c. die
6. "When I woke again there seemed to have been no **perceptible** descent of the pendulum."  
a. noticeable                      b. significant                      c. accidental
7. "Down—certainly, **relentlessly** down!"  
a. violently                      b. nonstop                      c. scarcely
8. "It now occurred to me that the bandage or strap that tied me was **unique**."  
a. unusual                      b. greasy                      c. rough
9. "I knew that it must be **severed** already in more than one place."  
a. ripped                      b. broken                      c. cut
10. "I saw that two of its iron angles were now **acute**."  
a. narrow                      b. sharp                      c. square



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM



### LITERARY FOCUS: REALISM AND IMAGERY

An image often describes something unfamiliar by comparing it to something familiar. For example, the narrator in this story describes the candles in the courtroom: “At first they wore a look of kindness. They seemed like white, slender angels who would save me.”

A person does not usually think of candles as looking kind. However, when the candles are compared to angels, it is possible to imagine how the candles can wear a look of kindness.

In this story, the vivid words create images that make the narrator’s suffering and horror seem real. The reader has probably never experienced this kind of suffering. But the imagery makes it seem real.

For each subject below, find quotes from the story that create realistic images. Then circle the words that help you picture what the author is trying to describe. (The first one in each section is done for you.)

#### 1. The dungeon

**shape:** “The room had been square. I saw that two of its iron angles were now acute. As a result, the other two angles had become obtuse. . . Instantly the cell had become diamond-shaped.”

**colors:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**smell:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. The pendulum

**sound:** “The blade had a very wide sweep of about thirty feet or more. The hissing energy of its descent was enough to break even these walls of iron.”

**touch/feeling:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**smell:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**appearance:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*continued*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

### 3. The rats

**touch/feeling:** “They pressed and swarmed on me in growing heaps. They squirmed upon my throat.  
Their cold lips met mine.”

**appearance:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**motion:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 4. The pit

**appearance:** “I now noticed the floor, too, which was of stone. In the center yawned the pit from whose jaws I had escaped.”

**smell:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**touch/feeling:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 5. The judges

**sound:** “After that, the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed to blend together in one dreamy, vague hum.”

**appearance:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM



### THE READING-WRITING CONNECTION: UNLOCKING PASSAGES

Answer the questions about these quotes taken from “The Pit and the Pendulum.” (Go back to the story if you need more clues.) Write your response to part *c* of each question on a separate sheet of paper.

1. “Yet all was not lost. In the deepest sleep—no! In feverish insanity—no! In fainting—no! In death—no! Even in the grave, all *is not* lost. Otherwise, there would be no everlasting life for man.” (page 10)

a. What does the passage mean as used in the story?

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- b. Do you think the prisoner truly felt all was not lost in his desperate situation? What does he do to support or challenge this statement? Why is the prisoner feeling this way? Give evidence to support your views.

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- c. **Journal writing:** Think of a time when you felt all was not lost by the “grave.” Go back in history or refer to a personal experience you or a friend had. What do you think about everlasting life for man? Is there anyone who has influenced you in your thoughts on everlasting life? Describe why this person may have influenced you.

2. “Painfully I stretched out my left arm as far as the bonds permitted. I took the small portion that the rats had spared me. As I took a bite, a half-formed thought of joy and hope rushed to my mind. Yet what business had *I* with hope?

“It was, as I said, a half-formed thought. Man has many such thoughts which are never completed. I felt it was of joy and hope. But I also felt it had died even while I was forming it.” (pages 19–20)

a. What does the passage mean as used in the story?

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*continued*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

b. Why did the prisoner feel he had no business thinking of hope? Why does he consider his thought only half-formed? Do you think he had any business thinking of hope? Why or why not?

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c. **Journal writing:** Write all of your thoughts down for five minutes. After doing this, look at what you have written. How many of the thoughts would you consider “half-formed”? Why didn’t you complete those thoughts? Do you think half-formed thoughts are often thoughts or things we don’t want to face?

3. “Free! I had only escaped one form of agony, to be delivered to another that was worse than death.” (page 23)

a. What does the passage mean as used in the story?

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b. In what sense is the prisoner free? How can something be worse than death? Why does the agony continue for the prisoner?

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c. **Journal writing:** Describe a situation that you think would be worse than death. Would there ever be a time when you would welcome death? Can death ever mean “freedom”?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM



### WRITING CORNER: SETTING

Setting is a very powerful element in a story. Setting isn't just the place or location of a story. The time the story takes place and the overall environment are also part of its setting.

Setting can serve as more than just background information. It may affect characters' actions. For instance, a group of castaways may have to learn how to survive on a desert island. Or it can create a certain mood—with wild winds or gentle breezes, blinding storms or soft rains, fields of flowers or burned landscapes.

1. First, discover more about the setting of "The Pit and the Pendulum." Go back to the story to help you answer the questions about setting.

#### Historical background

In what area of the world does the story take place? About what time in history do you think the action occurs?

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#### Action location

The main events in this story take place in the dungeon. Describe this location.

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2. Imagine how the story would change if you changed one part of the setting. For example, what if the prisoner could see the dungeon the whole time? Or what if the pit or the pendulum were not there? You might change the era in which the story takes place or change the location. You could also change the appearance or characteristics of the dungeon.

Choose one part of the setting to change. How will you change it? What effect will your changes have on the characters' actions or moods? Write a description two or three paragraphs long that answers these questions and details your changed setting. Share your ideas with the class.

*continued*





## THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM



### ONE STEP FURTHER

#### Class discussion

1. Why do you think the prisoner was sentenced to death? Do you think he really committed a crime, or was he just a prisoner of war?
2. How does the prisoner describe fainting? How does he compare it to someone who has not experienced fainting?
3. Which do you think would have been worse—the physical agonies or the mental horrors the man faced? Why?
4. Why do you think the prisoner was never given a name in the story? Would the story's impact have changed if the man had been given a name? Explain.
5. Were you surprised by the ending of this story? Why or why not? Were you disappointed? How did you think it would end? How does Poe keep your interest until the very end?

#### Written or oral reports

1. Research what actually happens to people when they faint. Find out what causes people to faint and what can be done about it.
2. Research the Inquisition. Why were enemies of the Roman Catholic Church arrested? Be sure to include the ceremonies referred to as *autos-da-fé*.
3. Find out what prison conditions are like in your area. Are they overcrowded? Are community members concerned about too many privileges for the inmates? What are the goals of the prisons and how successful are the inmates when they are released? Report your findings to the class.
4. Research how the pendulum in a clock works. Find out about different types of clocks and how they work. Look for information about the history of clocks.
5. Research Antoine Charles Louis Lasalle. Find out what his role was in the war against Spain. Find out other significant events in his life.

#### Creative writing activities

1. What do you think the trial would have been like for the man? Write a portion of the trial transcript.
2. *Stream of consciousness* is the continuous and unedited flow of thoughts in one's mind. It usually includes half-formed thoughts, memories, sense impressions, and feelings all jumbled together to represent the inner workings of a person's mind. It is often written with sentence fragments and unusual or no punctuation, spacing, and capitalization. Choose a scene from "The Pit and the Pendulum" and provide a stream of consciousness account of what was going through the prisoner's mind at that time.
3. Go back to the story and jot down colorful words, images, or phrases. Use these along with words of your own to write a poem about the prisoner's experience.
4. Pretend you were one of the man's tormentors. Write down your notes while observing the prisoner. These notes would be shared with your superior after you checked on the status of the prisoner. Describe your reaction to what he did while trying to escape. Share whether the prisoner was acting in a way you predicted or if you were surprised by his actions.
5. Imagine you are the prisoner and you have been rescued. Write a report to General Lasalle about your experiences as a prisoner in the hands of the Inquisition.

#### Artistic activities

1. Cut out figures from newspapers and magazines to make a picture of what the seven judges may have looked like. Be sure to include the black drapes.
2. Make bright color designs on a piece of paper and then paint or color over them in black. Take a sharp object like a toothpick to take off the black to create a picture of what the man may have seen or imagined.

*continued*

## THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

3. Make a cartoon figure of the man. Show how he used all five senses by making thought bubbles coming from his hands, ears, eyes, nose, and mouth. In the bubbles, draw pictures of the things he was touching, hearing, seeing, smelling, and tasting.

4. Create a replica of what you think the man's dungeon looked like. Be sure to label all the parts.

5. Make a historical map of Spain representing the period of the Inquisition (1478–1834). Be sure to include Toledo and other important places.

### Small-group activities

1. The judges must have done some careful planning to ensure the prisoner's death was slow

and painful. With a group, create a flowchart of what was planned for him at each turn. Your diagram should also include additional means of torturing the man had he made different choices than in the story. For example, what would have happened if he had landed in the pit and still not died?

2. Research forms of torture used throughout history. Create a questionnaire or survey with a rating system to evaluate the different tortures. Poll classmates, friends, family members, etc. Then compile the information and create a display of your findings that includes charts and other visuals.