

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Tell Tale Heart Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of the title of the story, “The Tell-Tale Heart”? What does the title mean?
2. Why does the narrator call himself “nervous” but not “mad” in paragraph 1? What does this tell us about him? How does the author’s point of view impact the telling of the story?
3. What do you think the relationship between the old man and the narrator is? What could have been the reason for the old man’s “vulture eye”?
4. Do you think the narrator would have killed the man if he did not have an “evil eye”? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.
5. The two main symbols in the story are the eye and the heart. What do these symbols represent? Why are they important?
6. What sound does the narrator hear after the murder? In reality, what could it be? Why does it get louder and louder?
7. The gender of the narrator is not revealed in the story, although many people assume it is a man. If the narrator were a woman, how would this change your interpretation of the story?
8. Repetition- Poe is known for using repetition in his work. Find a line that is repeated and tell how it impacts the story.

“Tell Tale Heart” Close Reading/Analysis

Focus Passage 1:

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution— with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it— oh, so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly—very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man’s sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! Would a madman have been so wise as this?

- The narrator claims to have several qualities that insane people don’t have. Circle the qualities that he mentions. In your opinion, does having those qualities prove his sanity—or not? Explain. _____

Focus Passage 2

It was open—wide, wide open—and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness—all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man’s face or person, for I had directed the ray, as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And now have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but overacuteness of the senses?—now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well too. It was the beating of the old man’s heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

- Underline three visual images, details that help you picture what is happening. Then, circle three sound images, details that help you hear what is happening.

Focus Passage 3:

No doubt I now grew very pale—but I talked more fluently and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased—and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound—much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath—and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly—more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations, but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observation of the men—but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what could I do? I foamed—I raved—I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder—louder—louder!

- What is happening to the narrator (lines 175–189)? What does he think he hears? What’s your explanation for the sound he hears? _____
