The Pit and the Pendulum

Edgar Allan Poe

Introduction

The stories
This collection is made up of five short stories by Edgar Allen Poe, the master of mystery and suspense.

The Pit and the Pendulum. This story is set in Spain during the Spanish Inquisition. A man finds himself in a pitch black room with a pit in the middle. For days he lives in fear of falling into the pit and dying, or being killed by the pendulum that is slowing coming closer to him. At the final moment, as he is about to fall into the pit, he is rescued by the French Army.

The Cask of Amontillado. This is about punishing a rival who has been cruel. The writer tempts his old friend into his cellars with the promise of some fine wine, knowing that he won’t be able to resist. As they go deeper into the cellars they taste many wines along the way, but always with the promise of the finest at the end. But, the writer has an evil plan and buries his rival in the cellar and walks away, knowing that no-one will hear the screams.

The Premature Burial. This is about a man who suffers from Catalepsy, when people appear to be dead when they are in fact asleep, and his greatest fear is being buried alive. He wakes up one day to find he is in a coffin and fears that the worst has happened. However, he is in a wooden bed on a boat and not buried alive.

The Meeting. This is a love story set in Venice. A handsome young man rescues the child of a beautiful young woman from the canal. What no-one knows is that the woman is in love with the young man and has done this on purpose to test his love. As a result they have both agreed that they cannot live without each other. They agree to commit suicide at sunrise by taking poison.

The Oval Portrait. The writer is staying in a room where there is a painting of a beautiful young woman. He feels that the painting is so realistic that the woman looks alive. He reads that the young woman died when her husband finished painting her, because he loved the painting of her more than he loved her.

Background to the stories
Edgar Allen Poe was born in America in 1809 and died in 1849. He wrote stories and poems of mystery, horror, death and madness all his adult life. He wrote the first detective story, The Murders in the Rue Morgue, that shows how a detective thinks.

Before reading
Here are some ways to help your students approach the story:

1. Give students the title of the book and show them the picture on the cover. Ask them to try and guess what kind of story it is.
2. Ask the students to read the text on the back cover of the book, and the story introduction on the first page. Then ask them a few questions about the story, or use the Before Reading Activities in the back of each Bookworm.
3. Use the pre-reading activity in this worksheet.
4. If there is a recording of this title, play the first few pages and stop at an interesting point.
The Pit and the Pendulum
Pre-reading activity

Match it!

Match the pictures with the words and the story titles.

Words
a We walked on, deep into the vaults.
b In my dreams the narrow wooden bed became my coffin.
c Looking down into the pit, I see...
d I held my torch higher, to see his face.
e With each move of the pendulum, that bright blade comes nearer and nearer.
f The young man stood next to the Marchesa with the child in his arms.
g It was a very fine painting, but there was also something strange about it.
h He painted hour after hour, not speaking a word, thinking only of his work.

Story Titles
i The Pit and the Pendulum
j The Cask of Amontillado
k The Premature Burial
l The Meeting
m The Oval Portrait

To the teacher

Aim: To encourage students to predict the content and themes of the five stories.

Time: 10–15 minutes

Organization: Give pairs of students the worksheets after they have read the cover and the introduction. Ask them to discuss and predict which story belongs with which pictures, and then add the words to the pictures. They may need to use a dictionary to check some of the more unusual words. Check the answers with the whole class.

Key: 1hm, 2ci, 3fl, 4gm, 5aj, 6bk, 7ei, 8dj
## The Pit and the Pendulum

*While reading activity*

### Order the events

*Put these events in the right order. Number them 1–8.*

1. The Pit and the Pendulum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORDER</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>He sees a yellow light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>He sees a picture of old Father Time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>He counts fifty steps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>He puts the fat on the ropes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>The judges order his death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>The walls are moving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>He thinks he is in a tomb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>The rats eat the rope.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The Cask of Amontillado

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORDER</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>They walk quickly to the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>He starts building a wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>They drink some Medoc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>He holds the torch higher, to see his face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>He meets his friend in the street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>They are under the river.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>They come to the deepest vault.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>He puts the last stone in the wall.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### To the teacher

**Where:** After the second story  
**Aim:** To check if students have understood and remember the sequence of events in the first two stories  
**Time:** 10 minutes  
**Organization:** This can be done with small groups of students. Give them one worksheet per group and let them discuss the events in the stories. When they have agreed, check with the whole class. After you have checked, encourage students to look back through the stories to find any details that they missed.  
**Key:** Activity 1: a7, b4, c3, d5, e1, f8, g2, h6  
Activity 2: a2, b6, c3, d7, e1, f4, g5, h8
The Pit and the Pendulum

After reading activity

Writing a summary

This is a summary of The Meeting. Fill in the gaps with the correct word.

poison old young sunrise love canal arms die handsome married

This story begins when a child falls from his mother’s ________ into a ________ in Venice. A ________ young man saves the child and gives him back to his mother, the beautiful Marchesa. The Marchesa is very sad. She talks to the ________ man and agrees to meet him one hour after ________.

The young man and the Marchesa are in ________, but she is ________ to a rich, ________ man. They say that they cannot live without each other and take ________ so that they will ________ and be together.

Choose your favourite story and write a summary here.

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

To the teacher

Aim: To help with summarizing and revision of reading

Time: 20–30 minutes

Organization: Give each student a copy of the worksheet. Allow them time to fill in the gaps and check their answers before they choose their favourite story.

They may want to have the book with them so they can read their chosen story again and check any details. Encourage them to self-check their summary before they give it to a partner to read.

Key: 1 arms, 2 canal, 3 handsome, 4 young, 5 sunrise, 6 love, 7 married, 8 old, 9 poison, 10 die