

THE FALL OF THE

House of Usher

A chronological guided-reading unit for Poe's difficult Gothic story

8-9 CLASS PERIODS

53 TEACHING SLIDES

18-PAGE STUDENT GUIDE



COMPREHENSION BEFORE INTERPRETATION

Students move through the story chronologically, stop for the language that actually blocks understanding, and build toward ambiguity, symbolism, and evidence-based analysis after the plot is secure.

Editable PowerPoint + Word files • Print-ready PDFs • A/B quizzes • Google Forms-ready bank

Students know what happened before you ask what it means.

The 18-page reading guide repeats a predictable rhythm: plot check → Poe in plain English → closer analysis → story-so-far recap.

DAY 1 - ARRIVAL

Why the narrator comes

Start with the situation before the setting takes over.

WORDS YOU NEED HERE

tarn — a dark pool or mountain lake

fissure — a narrow crack or split

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

1. Who is Roderick Usher to the narrator?

2. Why has Roderick asked him to visit?

OBSERVATION VS. INTERPRETATION

Write two details the narrator could physically point to, then one feeling or meaning he adds.

OBSERVATION 1	OBSERVATION 2	INTERPRETATION

POE → PLAIN ENGLISH

The narrator's "utter depression of soul" means:

LOOK CLOSER

Why does Poe let the narrator feel dread before anything frightening has happened?

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PLOT CLARITY

DAY 2 - RODERICK

A body under strain

Poe makes Roderick's condition physical, sensory, and emotional.

WORDS YOU NEED HERE

affliction — a condition that causes suffering

acute — extremely intense or sensitive

WHAT CHANGED?

One detail that makes Roderick seem dramatically altered:

THE FIVE SENSES

SENSE	WHAT RODERICK CANNOT TOLERATE
Sight	
Sound	
Taste	
Smell	
Touch	

POE → PLAIN ENGLISH

Roderick is less afraid of future events than of what fear will do to him. Put that idea in ordinary language:

KEEP THIS IDEA

What is Roderick afraid will eventually destroy him?

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POE → PLAIN ENGLISH

DAY 3 - BURIAL

Down into the vault

Build the scene in order.

WORDS YOU NEED HERE

entomb — to place a body in a tomb or burial chamber

vault — an enclosed underground chamber

WHY HERE?

Give one reason Roderick delays permanent burial.

FOLLOW THE ROUTE

DETAIL	WHAT IT TELLS US
The vault is beneath the house.	
It is close enough for sounds to travel.	
The door is heavy and metal.	
Madeline is sealed inside the family home.	

PICTURE THE SCENE

What makes this burial feel more like confinement than peaceful rest?

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CHRONOLOGICAL STOPS

Why teachers notice the difference:

- Vocabulary support is selective instead of overwhelming.
- Difficult ideas are translated before students analyze them.
- Thematic synthesis waits until students have the whole story.
- A separate Plot Catch-Up page supports absences without spoiling the packet.

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Analysis grows out of details students actually understand.

The Palace on Paper

Plotting Something

Sketch the palace as you picture it from Poe's descriptions. Label several choices with a word, phrase, or line number from the poem. Show both what the palace once was and what it has become.

YOUR PALACE

Two details I made sure to include

1. Detail from the poem: _____

Why I drew it this way: _____

2. Detail from the poem: _____

Why I drew it this way: _____

Accuracy matters more than artistic skill.

Plotting Something | Edgar Allan Poe 4

"THE HAUNTED PALACE"

Literal drawing first;
metaphor reveal second.

DAY 8 • COMPETING EXPLANATIONS

Two readings can survive at once

PACKET p.16 • CHECK

RATIONAL / NATURAL	GOTHIC / SUPERNATURAL
Madeline's illness may mimic death.	Madeline's return seems almost impossible.
Roderick hears her escape from the vault.	The twins seem unnaturally linked.
The narrator becomes suggestible under stress.	The house seems to exert influence.
The old fissure + storm explain the collapse.	The house dies when the Usher line dies.

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RATIONAL vs. GOTHIC

FINAL ANALYSIS

Build the connection across the story

Plan before you draft.

PROMPT

How does Poe develop connections among the House of Usher, the Usher family, and Roderick's state of mind across the story?

WORKING CLAIM

EARLIER EVIDENCE • WHAT IT SHOWS

LATER EVIDENCE • WHAT IT SHOWS

REASONING: HOW THE DETAILS CONNECT

CHECK BEFORE YOU TURN IT IN

☐ clear claim ☐ 2 specific details from different parts of the story ☐ explanation, not just summary

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FINAL EVIDENCE-BASED ANALYSIS

Students revisit the fissure, the Usher family line, Roderick's fear, the "Mad Trist" echoes, and competing natural/supernatural explanations before writing.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

A complete classroom-ready Usher sequence

PLOTTING SOMETHING | THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER | CLASSROOM READY REWILD

Eight-Day Pacing Map

DAY	READING FOCUS	PAGES	SLIDES	COLE THINKING
1	General overview / introduction	pp. 1-5	1-5	Introduction, background, overview
2	Roderick / Madeline	pp. 5-6	10-16	How serious, how family life
3	Life inside / prison / death	pp. 7-11	17-22	art, narrator's efforts, mental state
4	Power reveal / sentence / death report	pp. 12-13	23-29	extended metaphor, setting in, good
5	Temporary entombment	pp. 13-14	30-34	metaphor, death, death
6	After burial / storm	pp. 14-15	35-39	Rear sprouts, death in, death
7	Mad Trist / ending	pp. 16-18	40-47	sound patterns, death, death
8	Revelation / synthesis / ending	pp. 18-19	48-53	revelation, death, death

FLUENTLY NINETY DAY
 Trust 8-9 periods as the normal range. If discussion runs well or students need drafting time, move the final response to Day 9 rather than compressing the ending or ambiguity work.
 Reading anchors below were checked against the Project Gutenberg text of the story (ISBN #522). Punctuation and paragraph breaks may vary slightly by anthology or textbook edition.

Teacher Guide

16-PAGE TEACHER GUIDE

PLOTTING SOMETHING | THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER | REWILD

Quiz A

Name _____ Class _____ Score _____ / 10

Choose the best answer for each question.

- Why does the narrator travel to the House of Usher?
 - He is interested in the house.
 - Roderick is asking him to visit.
 - Madeline is asking him to bring a visitor.
 - He is interested in the house.
- Which detail best describes Roderick's condition?
 - He is a person who is very serious.
 - He is a person who is very serious to ordinary things.
 - He is a person who is very serious to ordinary things.
 - He is a person who is very serious to ordinary things.
- What is Roderick most afraid will destroy him?
 - The narrator.
 - His mind and its effects on him.
 - The plague.
 - Living the house in a storm.
- What does Madeline do when the narrator first sees her?
 - She looks through the room without speaking to him.
 - She asks him to go to a prison.
 - She leaves the estate.
 - She stays with the narrator.
- What small structural detail does the narrator notice early?
 - A broken mirror.
 - A broken mirror.
 - A broken mirror.
 - A broken mirror.
- What does the narrator notice about the house?
 - A broken mirror.
 - A broken mirror.
 - A broken mirror.
 - A broken mirror.
- What happens at the end?
 - Madeline escapes alone.
 - Roderick escapes alone.
 - The house and the house collapse into the sea.
 - The narrator kills the narrator.

Answer key: 1. B, 2. C, 3. B, 4. A, 5. A, 6. A, 7. C, 8. C, 9. C, 10. C

Comprehension Quiz

A/B QUIZZES + KEY

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Plot Catch-Up

The story in ten moves

Use after the ending, or give selectively to a student who needs to catch-up.

- Narrator arrives because Roderick asked him to visit.
- The house and landscape immediately feel wrong; the narrator notices a fissure.
- Roderick explains his hypersensitivity and his fear that fear itself will destroy him.
- Madeline, Roderick's twin, is seriously ill.
- The narrator tries to help Roderick through books, art, music, and company.
- "The Haunted Palace" reflects a beautiful mind / realm becoming corrupted.
- Madeline is reported dead and temporarily placed in a vault beneath the house.
- Roderick deteriorates and seems to listen for something; the narrator becomes afraid too.
- During "The Mad Trist," sounds in the book echo sounds in the house; Roderick says Madeline was buried alive.
- Madeline returns; the twins die; the narrator flees; the house collapses into the sea.

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PLOT CATCH-UP SUPPORT

STUDENT + TEACHING MATERIALS

- 53-slide guided teaching presentation
- 18-page chronological student reading guide
- 7-page "Haunted Palace" visual close-reading activity
- 1-page spoiler-separated Plot Catch-Up handout

TEACHER SUPPORT + ASSESSMENT

- 16-page teacher guide with exact reading anchors
- Page-by-page suggested answers and teaching notes
- Two versions of a comprehension quiz + answer key
- Google Forms-ready quiz bank CSV

46 printable pages + 53-slide deck

The complete story text is not included. Use your preferred print or digital edition; exact opening/closing phrases in the teacher guide make the pacing edition-independent.