

Step Up to Sixth Form: A Level English Literature



Read the extract from "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe and then complete the tasks that follow.

These tasks help you to practise working through the **content and implied meanings** in a text, as well as **re-writing** and **re-imagining** an original text. There is a choice of **creative writing tasks** inspired by this extract.

"THE TELL-TALE HEART" by Edgar Allan Poe

True! -- nervous – dreadfully nervous, I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? Hearken! And observe 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. I loved the old man. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so, I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

You should have seen how wisely I proceeded. 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! I put in a dark lantern, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. I moved it slowly – very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously so that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. This I did for seven long nights.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves no more slowly than did mine. When I had waited a long time, very patiently, I resolved to open a very little crevice in the lantern, until, at length, a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot out and fell upon the vulture eye.

It was open – wide open – and I grew furious as I gazed upon it! A dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones. There came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. 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.

A new anxiety seized me – the sound would be heard by a neighbor! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once – once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. At length it ceased. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. The old man was dead! His eye would trouble me no more.

Tasks:

1. **Explain** how the writer:
 - Builds suspense
 - Presents the personality of the narrator
 - Presents the character of the old man

2. Choose **1** of these tasks:
 - **Write** part or all of the above extract in your own words. You don't have to change every single word but it should sound very different in tone and language use.
 - **Write** the beginning of the story from the old man's point of view.
 - **Write** your own story of suspense and danger where you, as narrator, are the one who is dangerous. Try to create a strong sense of personality for your narrator.
 - **Create** a news-story based on the events of either your own story of the part of the story told in this extract from The Tell-Tale Heart. If you decide to use the extract then include reference to the murder or attack on the old man with the vulture eye. Your news story can be for either a newspaper, online story or the text for the television news.

You should bring both of these tasks to your first English Literature lesson in the new academic year.