

Contents

The Fall of the House of Usher

About the Author	6
Before Reading	8
The Fall of the House of Usher	13
After Reading	47

The Oval Portrait

About the Book	58
Before Reading	59
The Oval Portrait	63
After Reading	69

The Masque of the Red Death

About the Book	80
Before Reading	81
The Masque of the Red Death	85
After Reading	98

Before Reading

- 1** Look at these scenes from *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Discuss with a partner.



- Write at least 5 words or phrases to describe each scene.
- What is the atmosphere like in each one?
- What is happening in each scene?

- 2** Working in groups of three or four, look at the pictures and your descriptions once more. Together write two or three sentences to describe what you think will happen in the story. Compare your summary with those of the other groups in the class.


- 3** You may find this story and the others in this book very frightening. Or perhaps nothing frightens you! Work with a partner. Describe your scariest experience, or something you heard or saw that made you feel afraid.


4 Irrational fears are also called phobias. Can you match these phobias with their meanings?

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---|-----------------------|
| a) <input type="checkbox"/> | arachnophobia | 1 | fear of closed spaces |
| b) <input type="checkbox"/> | claustrophobia | 2 | fear of storms |
| c) <input type="checkbox"/> | brontophobia | 3 | fear of dead things |
| d) <input type="checkbox"/> | agoraphobia | 4 | fear of spiders |
| e) <input type="checkbox"/> | necrophobia | 5 | fear of open spaces |

5 What are you afraid of? Here are some of the things that make people feel afraid. How do they affect you? Rate them from 0 (not at all scary) to 5 (very scary).

- a) bees and wasps
- b) being on your own
- c) exams
- d) flying
- e) going to the dentist
- f) heights
- g) lifts
- h) the dark

 **6 Work with a partner and write sentences comparing how you both feel about the things above.**

 **7 Listen to the opening of the story. Which of the sentences below best describes how the narrator feels? Tick (✓).**

- a) The narrator is looking forward to going to the House of Usher.
- b) The narrator is indifferent to going to the House of Usher.
- c) The narrator feels uneasy and unhappy about going to the House of Usher.



5 For a whole dull, dark, and soundless autumn day, when the clouds were low in the sky, I had been riding alone through the dreary countryside. Eventually, as evening fell, I found myself within view of the melancholy House of Usher. When I saw the building, I felt a sense of gloom.

PLACES

Have you ever visited a place and suddenly felt happy or sad? Describe how you felt. Why did this place make you feel this way? Was it something to do with the weather, the appearance of the place, or the people who were there?

I looked at the scene before me – at the house and the simple landscape, at the bleak walls, at the vacant eye-like windows, at the rough grass, and at a few white trunks of decayed trees – with a sense of depression, like an opium addict awakening from his dream. I felt a sense of iciness and my heart felt cold and heavy. What was it that made me so nervous when I thought about the House of Usher? It was a mystery, and I could not fight against the dark thoughts that filled me.

Glossary

- **bleak:** empty, cold and depressing
- **decayed:** rotten; destroyed through age
- **dreary:** boring and dark; without life
- **dull:** not bright
- **gloom:** darkness and depression

I was forced to come to the unsatisfactory conclusion that some things are beyond our understanding. If the scene in front of me had been arranged in any different way it possibly would not have left me with such a sad impression. With this in mind, I rode my horse to the edge of a black lake that was close to the house and, trembling more than before, I looked down on the reflection of the grey grass, the ghastly tree trunks, and the empty eye-like windows in the water.

Nevertheless, I was proposing to stay a few weeks in this gloomy house. Its owner, Roderick Usher, had been one of my childhood companions, but it had been many years since our last meeting. A letter from him had reached me, and it gave evidence that he was very disturbed. The writer spoke of physical illness, and of a disorder of the mind. He said I was his best and only friend, and he felt that the cheerfulness of my company would lessen his malady. I did not hesitate when I read this. I obeyed his request immediately.

RODERICK USHER

How does the narrator know Roderick Usher?

Why does Usher write to the narrator?

What does Usher ask the narrator to do?

Glossary

- **ghastly:** horrible and frightening
- **lessen:** make less
- **malady:** illness

The Fall of the House of Usher

Although, as boys, we had been quite close, I knew very little about my friend. He had always been very reserved •. I was aware •, however, that his family had displayed its talent over the years in many works of art. They had also performed repeated acts of charity, as well as showing passionate devotion to music. I learned too that, for the most part, the Usher family had never produced • any continuing branch •. And that the entire family was in a direct line of descent •. Indeed this had always been the case with very little variation.



OWN

- **branch:** descendants; sons, daughters, grandchildren. etc.
- **direct line of descent:** there was always just one child who had children of their
- **I was aware:** I knew
- **produced:** (here) had children
- **reserved:** quiet; shy; private

I began to think about how the character of the house perfectly matched the character of the people who lived in it, and I speculated on the possible influence that, over the centuries, the one might have exercised on the other. Indeed it was this lack of descendants, and the continual passing down from father to son of the family home along with the family name, which had eventually caused both to be identified with the title of the estate: the 'House of Usher'. In the minds of the peasantry who used it, this title seems to include both the family and the family mansion.

FAMILY

What do we know about the Usher family?

Tick the correct answers.

- Roderick has got a large extended family.
- Roderick's family are interested in the arts.
- Roderick's family inherited the house recently.
- The Usher family has always been small.

Now think of your own family.

How far can you trace your family tree?

Glossary

- **estate:** a family's house and land
- **exercised:** (here) had
- **lack:** absence
- **mansion:** large noble house
- **passing down:** giving from one generation to the next
- **peasantry:** country people
- **perfectly matched:** was exactly like
- **speculated:** guessed (about)

After Reading

Characters

- 1 Work with a partner. What facts do you know about the narrator, Roderick, and Madeline? Write two sentences about each of these characters.
- 2 Here is an extract from a police report describing Roderick Usher. See if you can complete it using information from the story.

People who knew Roderick Usher said that he had changed a lot in recent years. They say that his skin was as as that of a / is eyes had become and..... . In fact people found the of his skin and the look of his eyes quite startling. is lips were said to be and very..... . e had a nose, but his were broad. is was finely-shaped and he had a forehead. is hair could be described as....., and like a web, but it was also very and..... . Judging by his appearance he did not seem at all

- 3 Do you think that Roderick Usher is mad? Look for evidence in the story to support your theory. Make a list of any behaviour that seems normal or abnormal to you.