

# Preparing to Read

## The Raven

by Edgar Allan Poe

### LITERARY SKILLS FOCUS: SOUND EFFECTS

Edgar Allan Poe was a master of creating **sound effects** in his stories and poems. Below is a list of the sound effects that Poe uses in “The Raven.”

Sound effect and definition	Example
<b>Refrain:</b> Repeated phrases or lines, usually at the end of a stanza.	“Nevermore.”
<b>Internal rhyme:</b> Rhyme that occurs within a line or consecutive lines.	“While I nodded, nearly <b>napping</b> , suddenly there came a <b>tapping</b> ”
<b>Alliteration:</b> Repetition of a consonant sound.	“While I <b>n</b> odded, <b>n</b> early <b>n</b> apping, suddenly there came a <b>t</b> apping”
<b>Onomatopoeia:</b> Use of words that sound like what they describe.	“While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a <b>tapping</b> ”



**Reading Standard 3.4**  
Analyze ways in which poets use imagery, personification, figures of speech, and sounds to evoke readers' emotions.

# Preparing to Read

## The Raven

### READING SKILLS FOCUS: INTERPRETING MEANING THROUGH ORAL READING

To enjoy Poe, and to be sure you understand the meaning of each line of this famous poem, read the poem aloud or listen to an **oral reading**. Feel the beat of the lines and listen for the rhyming sounds, the repeated consonant sounds, and the use of onomatopoeia. After you have read the poem aloud or heard it read aloud at least once, you should find that your understanding of the text has improved. As you read or listen, bear in mind that literary sound effects—just like movie sound effects—have a purpose. Think about what Poe is trying to accomplish with the sound effects he uses in the “The Raven.”

The chart below provides one example of finding more depth and meaning in a poem by interpreting its sound devices.

Text	Interpretation of sound effect
Line 13: “The <u>s</u> ilken, <u>s</u> ad, <u>u</u> ncertain <u>r</u> ustling of each purple curtain”	The repetition of the “s” sound (alliteration) echoes the sound that silken curtains would make when rustling in the wind.

# THE RAVEN

by Edgar Allan Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door—

5 “ ’Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber  
door — **A**

Only this and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the  
floor.

Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow  
10 From my books surcease<sup>1</sup> of sorrow—sorrow for the lost  
Lenore—

For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Nameless *here* for evermore. **B**

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain  
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;  
15 So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating  
“ ’Tis some visitor entreating<sup>2</sup> entrance at my chamber door—  
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—  
This it is and nothing more.” **C**

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,  
20 “Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;<sup>3</sup>  
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,  
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,

1. **surcease:** end.
2. **entreating:** begging; asking.
3. **implore:** plead; ask.

## **A** LANGUAGE COACH

*Tapping* and *rapping* are examples of **onomatopoeia**, which is a word that sounds like what it describes. *Buzz* and *quack* are also examples. Think of three other examples of onomatopoeia and write them below.

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## **B** LITERARY FOCUS

Circle the **internal rhymes** in this stanza.

## **C** READING FOCUS

With a partner, take turns performing an **oral reading** of this stanza. Which sound effects most come to life for you this way?

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**A LITERARY FOCUS**

Underline the **alliteration** in line 26.

**B LITERARY ANALYSIS**

What does the speaker say might be causing the tapping? Do you think he really believes his own explanation? Why or why not?

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**C QUICK CHECK**

Who or what enters the speaker's chamber?

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That I scarce was sure I heard you"—here I opened wide the door;—

Darkness there and nothing more.

25 Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering,  
fearing,

Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream  
before; **A**

But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,  
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word,  
“Lenore?”

This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word,  
“Lenore!”

30 Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,  
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.

“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice;<sup>4</sup>  
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—

35 Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—  
’Tis the wind and nothing more!” **B**

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and  
flutter,

In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;<sup>5</sup>  
Not the least obeisance<sup>6</sup> made he; not a minute stopped or  
stayed he;

40 But, with mien<sup>7</sup> of lord or lady, perched above my chamber  
door— **C**

4. **lattice**: shutter or screen formed by strips or bars overlaid in a crisscross pattern.

5. **Raven . . . of yore**: *Of yore* is an obsolete way of saying “of time long past.” Poe’s allusion is to 1 Kings 17:1-6, which tells of the prophet Elijah being fed by ravens in the wilderness.

6. **obeisance** (OH BAY SIHNS): gesture of respect.

7. **mien** (MEEN): manner.

Perched upon a bust of Pallas<sup>8</sup> just above my chamber door—  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling<sup>9</sup> my sad fancy into smiling,  
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,  
45 “Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure  
no craven,  
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly  
shore—  
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!”<sup>10</sup>  
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.” **D**

Much I marveled this ungainly<sup>11</sup> fowl to hear discourse so plainly,  
50 Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;  
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being  
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—  
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,  
With such name as “Nevermore.”

55 But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only  
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.  
Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—  
Till I scarcely more than muttered “Other friends have flown  
before—  
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my Hopes have flown before.”  
60 Then the bird said “Nevermore.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,  
“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store  
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful  
Disaster

Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—

8. **Pallas:** Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom.

9. **beguiling** (BIH GY LIHNG): deceiving.

10. **Plutonian shore:** Pluto is the Greek god of the underworld—the land of darkness—called Hades (HAY DEEZ). Hades is separated from the world of the living by several rivers; hence, the mention of a shore.

11. **ungainly:** unattractive.

**D** READING FOCUS

First, use a dictionary to look up any unfamiliar words in this stanza. Then, read this stanza aloud. How does knowing the meanings of the words in this stanza affect your **oral reading** of it?

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**A QUICK CHECK**

How does the speaker explain the bird's ability to say "Nevermore"?

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**B LITERARY FOCUS**

Underline the **internal rhyme** in this line.

**C VOCABULARY**

**Word Study**

A *censer* is a container in which incense is burned, usually during religious services. What is a homophone (a word that sounds the same but has a different meaning and spelling) of *censer*? What is the meaning of this word?

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65 Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore  
Of 'Never—nevermore.' ” **A**

But the Raven still beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,  
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust  
and door;

Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking **B**  
70 Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—  
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of  
yore

Meant in croaking “Nevermore.”

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing  
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;  
75 This and more I sat divining,<sup>12</sup> with my head at ease reclining  
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamplight gloated o'er,  
But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamplight gloating o'er,  
*She* shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an  
unseen censer **C**  
80 Swung by seraphim<sup>13</sup> whose footfalls tinkled on the tufted floor.  
“Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he  
hath sent thee

12. **divining**: guessing; supposing.

13. **seraphim**: highest of the nine ranks of angels.

Respite—respite and nepenthe<sup>14</sup> from thy memories of Lenore;  
Quaff,<sup>15</sup> oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost  
Lenore!”

Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

85 “Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here  
ashore,

Desolate yet all undaunted,<sup>16</sup> on this desert land enchanted—  
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—  
Is there—is there balm in Gilead?<sup>17</sup>—tell me—tell me, I implore!”

90 Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.” **D**

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!  
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both  
adore—

Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,<sup>18</sup>  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—

95 Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name  
Lenore.”

Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.” **E**

“Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!” I shrieked,  
upstarting—

“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!

Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!

100 Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!

Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my  
door!”

Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

14. **nepenthe** (NIH PEHN THEE): sleeping potion that people once believed would relieve pain and sorrow.

15. **quaff**: drink heartily.

16. **undaunted**: unafraid.

17. **Is . . . Gilead**: literally, “Is there any relief from my sorrow?” Poe paraphrases a line from Jeremiah 8:22: “Is there no balm in Gilead?” Gilead was a region in ancient Palestine known for its healing herbs, such as balm, a healing ointment.

18. **Aidenn**: Arabic for “Eden; Heaven.”

**D** READING FOCUS

Read this stanza aloud. Take careful note of how the lines are punctuated and what sounds are repeated in your **oral reading**. How would you describe the speaker’s state of mind here?

**E** QUICK CHECK

In your own words, restate the request the speaker makes to the Raven in this stanza. How does the Raven respond?



Using details from the text, describe how the mood of the poem *transforms*, or changes, from the beginning to the end.

[illegible]

105     And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,  
        And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the  
              floor;

And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted—nevermore! **A**

**19. pallid:** pale.

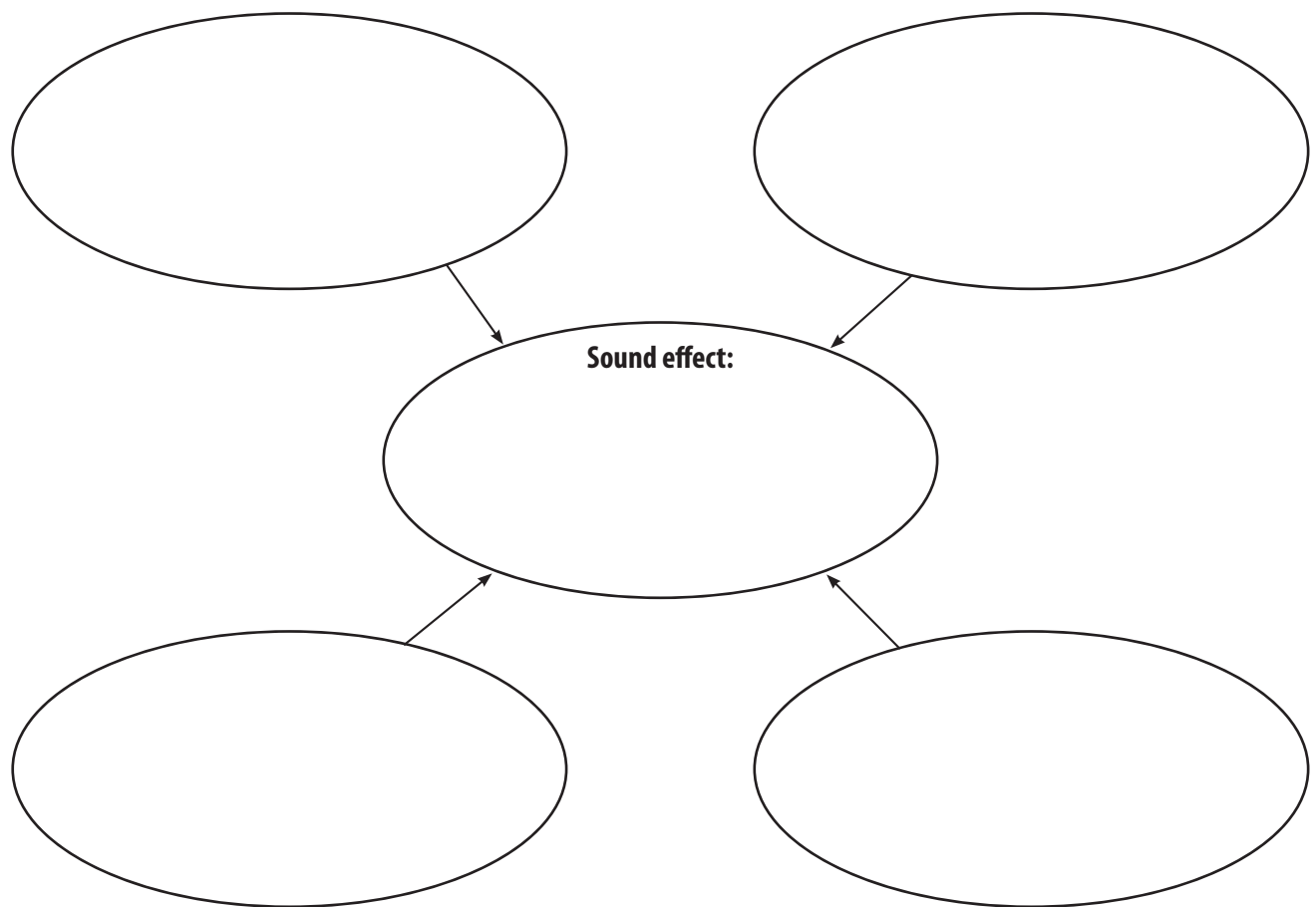


# Skills Practice

## The Raven

### USE A CONCEPT MAP

**DIRECTIONS:** Use the concept map below to create a record of the **sound effects** used in “The Raven.” Select one kind of sound effect—**refrain**, **internal rhyme**, **alliteration**, or **onomatopoeia**—and write it in the center oval. In each of the four surrounding ovals, write one example of the sound effect you chose from “The Raven.”



# Applying Your Skills

## The Raven

### LITERARY SKILLS FOCUS: SOUND EFFECTS

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the following lines from “The Raven.” In the second column, identify any examples of **internal rhyme**, **alliteration**, **onomatopoeia**, or **refrain** in the lines given. Remember that a line may have more than one kind of **sound effect**.

Line from “The Raven”	Type of sound effect
“Meant in croaking ‘Nevermore.’” (line 72)	1.
“Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;” (line 26)	2.
“But the Raven still beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,” (line 67)	3.

### READING SKILLS FOCUS: INTERPRETING MEANING THROUGH ORAL READING

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the poem “The Raven” aloud. Write a paragraph explaining how an **oral reading** enhances the effect of the poem.



**Reading Standard 3.4**  
Analyze ways in which poets use imagery, personification, figures of speech, and sounds to evoke readers’ emotions.

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