

The Fall of the House of Usher

A spine-tingling tale based on Edgar Allan Poe's famous story

About the Story

Lexile® Measure 890L (captions only)
For qualitative complexity factors, go to
Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to produce a scene from the play, maintaining the eerie mood created by the playwright

Featured Skill: author's craft

Additional skills covered in this lesson plan: mood, text structure, key ideas and details, critical thinking

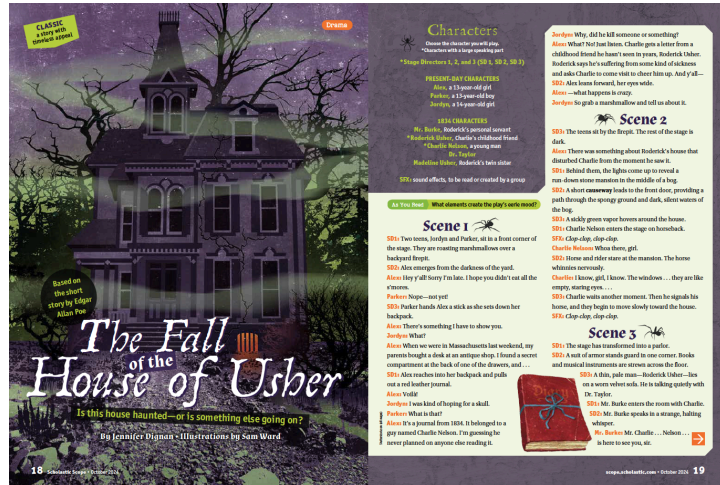
Essential Question:

- Why do we like scary stories?
- What is fear and how does it affect us?
- How do writers create mood?

Standards:

The article and its suite of support materials support these Common Core Anchor Standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, W.2, SL.1

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary
- Scope It Out! Podcast: The Science of Fear

Videos:

- The Amazing Life of Edgar Allan Poe
- What's the Mood?

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- Special Collection: "Stories for Halloween"

Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Discussion Questions
- Core Skills Workout: Inference
- Featured Skill: Prepare Your Scene
- Choice Board
- Lesson Plan Slide Deck
- Quiz*

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

1. Prepare to Read (15 minutes)

Watch a Video (5 minutes)

- Show students the video “**The Amazing Life of Edgar Allan Poe**” to introduce them to the famous author of the short story on which the play they are about to read is based. After watching, give students a few minutes to share anything they found particularly interesting or surprising, or anything the video made them curious about.

Chat About Scary Stories (5 minutes)

- Have a brief discussion with students about scary stories. Ask volunteers to share whether they like scary books and movies and why or why not.

Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Project the Google Slides version of **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. Highlighted words: *acute*, *causeway*, *wrenched*. Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides. Optionally, print the PDF version or share the slideshow link to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently before class.

2. Read and Discuss (55 minutes)

- Invite a volunteer to read aloud the As You Read box on page 19 or at the top of the digital story page. Review the meaning of *eerie*: strange or mysterious in a way that makes you feel frightened or uneasy; spooky.
- Assign parts and read the play aloud as a class. *Note*: Before reading the play aloud in class—perhaps even a day or more in advance—you might want to assign the roles and give the sound effects team time to plan how they will create the sound effects throughout the play.
- Divide students into groups to discuss the following **Discussion Questions**, which are also located in the Resources tab.

Discussion Questions

(30 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" was published in 1839. Clearly, the modern-day teens in Jennifer Dignan's play were not in Poe's original story. Why do you think Dignan might have added the teens for her adaptation? (author's craft)**
Answers will vary. Students might offer that perhaps Dignan added the teens to create characters Scope's readers could relate to, to modernize the story or to add a bit of lightness to a seriously creepy story. Dignan also may have added the teens to serve as narrators; the teens' role in the play is to set up the story and then wrap up what happens at the end.
2. **In Scene 2, how does the setting help create an eerie mood? (mood)** *In Scene 2, Roderick's house is described as a run-down mansion in the middle of a bog and surrounded by a "sickly green vapor." All these details help create an eerie mood. That the mansion is run-down suggests that something is wrong—why isn't anyone taking care of the mansion? Bogs can be creepy; their waters are full of decaying plants, and they threaten to swallow up any creature that steps in the wrong place. The sickly green vapor is strange and mysterious. That the house's windows are like "empty, staring eyes," as Charlie describes them, adds even more eeriness.*
3. **Besides the setting in Scene 2, what is something else in the play that helps create an eerie mood? (mood)** *This story is filled with eerie details, so answers will vary. Students may name the strange way Mr. Burke speaks, Dr. Taylor's nervous manner, Roderick's terrible condition (his acute senses and his fearful manner), the tragedy of Madeline's illness and apparent death and that she was entombed alive, additional details about the setting (such as the empty suit of armor "standing guard" in Roderick's parlor or the storm in Scene 7), or the ghastly conclusion when Roderick and Madeline fall to the ground dead and the house falls apart and sinks into the bog!*
4. **In Scene 3, why is the detail that Madeline's illness causes her to go into trancelike states important? (text structure)** *This detail is important because it provides an explanation for why Madeline was taken for dead and placed in a coffin. At the end of the play, you can look back and conclude that Madeline was actually in a trance, not dead.*
5. **Poe decided to call his story "The Fall of the House of Usher," and the Usher family house definitely plays a big part in the story. You might even think of it as a character. Describe what the house is like and why it's so important to the story. (key ideas and details)**
Students might describe the house as wicked, sinister, evil, or cursed. The weird green vapor that surrounds the house suggests there is something supernatural about it. Perhaps most importantly, the house is closely connected to Roderick and Madeline; there's even a suggestion that the house might be responsible for their misfortune. In Scene 3, Roderick mutters that his suffering is to be expected after so many years in the house, and in Scene 4 he says that the house would not like it if he were to leave it. In other words, Roderick seems to believe that the house is

sentient—capable of thoughts and feelings. Also, although it's technically Roderick and Charlie who trap Madeline in the cellar, you could think of the house itself as trapping Madeline. Finally, the house cracking apart and sinking into the bog—taking the Ushers with it—provides a dramatic conclusion to the story.

6. **What do you think kills Roderick and Madeline at the end?** (critical thinking) *Answers will vary. Students might say that Madeline dies as a result of having been locked in a coffin for days and that Roderick dies from the shock of seeing her and/or from the mysterious illness that has been plaguing him. Or perhaps the twins die through some supernatural means—the house brings them down along with itself.*

3. Go Deeper: Why We Like Scary Stories (20 minutes)

- Draw students' attention to the sidebar "Why Do We Love Scary Stuff?" Ask them if the information sounds right to them in light of your pre-reading discussion about liking or not liking scary stories.
- If students have read this issue's Short Read, "How Spicy Is Too Spicy?," ask them what connection they can draw between that article and "Why Do We Love Scary Stuff?" *The Short Read explains that some people enjoy eating spicy foods because of the rush it gives them—that eating spicy foods can be similar to being terrified while riding a roller coaster and then wanting to do it again. Eating spicy foods and reading or watching a scary story can both give you an intense experience without really putting you in danger (unless of course you go overboard with the spicy food, which really can be dangerous).*
- For even more on fear, have students listen to the podcast "The Science of Fear."

4. Plan and Perform a Scene (45 minutes)

- Have students work in groups to complete the **Featured Skill Activity: Prepare Your Scene**. This activity will prepare them to respond to the prompt on page 23 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page:

As a group, act out one scene from the play. Include costumes and sound effects. Be sure to create an eerie mood!

- Make a plan with students for how they will rehearse their scenes and then perform or present them on video for each other.

- Alternatively, have students choose a task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of culminating tasks. Our Choice Board options include the writing prompt from the magazine, differentiated versions of the writing prompt, and additional creative ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of a story or article.

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- Special Collection: [“Stories for Halloween”](#)