

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Cask of Amontillado by Edgar Allan Poe

Book Information

Edgar Allan Poe, The Cask of Amontillado

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Book Level: 7.3

Interest Level: UG

After enduring many injuries of the noble Fortunato, Montresor executes the perfect revenge.

Topics: Adventure, Crime; Behavior, Revenge; Classics, Classics (All); Series, Creative Short Stories; Short Stories, Short Stories (All)

Main Characters

Fortunato a connoisseur of wine who has insulted the good name of the main character

Montresor the main character and narrator of the story, who has vowed revenge on Fortunato

Vocabulary

connoisseurship the ability to judge art or matters of taste

flambeaux flaming torches

grotesque having a bizarre distortion

nitre potassium nitrate

Synopsis

The Cask of Amontillado, a short story of terror and horror, takes place in Italy. The main character, Montresor, feigns friendship with Fortunato. Fortunato apparently had, at one time, insulted the good name of Montresor. Montresor vows revenge, but is careful not to vocalize his intent.

It is carnival season, and one evening during the celebrations, Montresor and Fortunato accidentally meet. Fortunato is wearing the costume of a jester, while Montresor is wearing a cloak and mask. Fortunato has been drinking heavily. Fortunato is considered to be a connoisseur of wine, and Montresor also values Italian vintages and is known

as a purchaser of such wines. Montresor tells Fortunato that he has purchased a pipe of Amontillado and wishes Fortunato to follow him to the family vaults to taste the wine and tell him if it is authentic. Montresor gets Fortunato to follow him through the burial vaults piled high with bones by plying him with drink and appealing to his pride. Montresor brings out a trowel from beneath his cape in preparation for the walling up of Fortunato in the crypt. Because of his drunkenness and anticipation of the wine, Fortunato is unaware of Montresor's plot.

When the two reach the farthest interior crypt, Montresor chains Fortunato to the granite. Montresor begins to close the wall. Fortunato realizes his predicament as his drunkenness wears off. He begins to shriek and shout in terror. Montresor clamors back, surpassing Fortunato's yells in volume and strength.

It is midnight when Montresor is ready to place the last stone. Fortunato still holds out hope that this is a joke. Finally, Fortunato no longer answers when Montresor speaks to him. Montresor throws the torch through the hole and forces the last stone into place. He rearranges the old bones, which remain in place fifty years later. *In pace requiescat!* (Rest in Peace!) are Montresor's final words.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why does Fortunato not suspect Montresor's plot for revenge?

Montresor has waited a long time after the insult to take revenge. Montresor has never verbalized that he felt insulted nor has he told anyone about his plans for revenge. He shows good will toward Fortunato and appears to be concerned for Fortunato's welfare.

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Literary Analysis

Irony is a contrast between what appears to be and what really is. In this story Poe uses irony. What is ironic about Fortunato's name and his costume?

Fortunato's name suggests good fortune, but his fortune turns out to be ill-fated. Fortunato's jester's costume is designed to be used by someone who entertains others, but in this case he is the victim of a cruel "joke."

Inferential Comprehension

In this story the evils that Fortunato committed against Montresor are only mentioned and not explained. Why do you think this background information is omitted?

The evils are more effectively left to the reader's imagination. If explained, the reader may not perceive them as truly evil. The story really explores the nature of revenge, rather than the specific causes that incite revenge.

Constructing Meaning

In verbal irony there is a contrast between what is said and what is actually meant. Locate the phrases that refer to Fortunato's coughing, Montresor drinking to Fortunato's long life, and both men being masons. What is ironic about each?

Fortunato's cough will not kill him, but Montresor's cruel revenge does, shortly after Montresor expresses concern about Fortunato's health. Drinking to a long life is ironic because Montresor knows how soon Fortunato's life will end. Fortunato is a member of a fraternal society called the Masons, while Montresor uses the trade tools and materials of a mason to entomb Fortunato.

Teachable Skills

Extending Meaning The concept of revenge is vital to the plot of this story. Students are probably familiar with the feelings of revenge. Ask the students to define revenge. Have them research crimes of revenge in history or in current news. Choose one story from the research and

retell it "Poe style," by including plenty of suspense-creating details.

Recognizing Details The setting details help create a mood and advance the plot. Have students work in groups to go through the story and list ten setting details. They should note after each how the detail contributes to the overall effect of the setting.

Understanding Characterization Have students write either an obituary or a eulogy for Fortunato. Have students base their work on character information from the story in addition to their own invented circumstances for whatever events occur beyond the end of the story.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning *The Cask of Amontillado* is filled with phrases that become even more meaningful and chilling once the ending of the story is known. Have students choose a phrase or sentence that is figurative, ironic, or suggestive of what lies ahead and make a drawing to accompany it. The phrases and illustrations can then be displayed sequentially.