Unit 3/Week 3

Title: The Cask of Amontillado

Suggested Time: 3-4 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.5; W.9-10.1, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.9; SL.9-10.1; L.9-10.1, L.9-10.2, L.9-10.4, L.9-10.5

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Edgar Allen Poe uses sensory details, descriptions, and dialogue in order to create a suspenseful, eerie, and sinister mood.

Synopsis

In this chilling tale by Edgar Allen Poe, Montresor seeks revenge on Fortunato for past insults. During Mardi Gras festivals, Montresor tells Fortunato, a wine connoisseur, of some wine he has acquired. However, he is unsure of the exact type and quality of the wine and seeks the opinion of another. Since Fortunato appears to be busy, Montresor says he will visit with another man for his opinion. Fortunato insists on helping Montresor and asks him to take him to his vaults, where the wine is kept. Montresor tries to convince Fortunato not to bother both above ground and even once they get underground, but Fortunato will not hear of it. In effect, Fortunato falls directly into Montresor’s twisted web. The two men go down to where the catacombs of Montresor’s family are and continue along a long, damp passageway until they reach the very end. Along the way, Montresor gives Fortunato wine in order to keep him intoxicated. This works, and Fortunato even jests throughout their journey. Once they reach the end of the passageway, Montresor is able to easily chain Fortunato to the wall due to his inebriated state. Much to Fortunato’s surprise, Montresor uses stone and mortar to brick Fortunato in and leave him for dead.

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| Why does the narrator want revenge? What does it mean that he seeks to “punish with impunity”? | The narrator, Montresor, wants revenge for Fortunato’s past insults against him; he stated, “but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge.” As the text states in the margin definition, impunity means freedom from persecution or harm. This means that Montresor wanted to seek revenge without having to deal with any consequences for his actions. |
| Montresor describes Fortunato’s knowledge of different topics. What does Montresor mean when he says, “In painting and gemmary Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack--but in the matter of old wines he was sincere”? Why is this important? | Fortunato’s knowledge of gems and painting is superficial and only meant to allow him to “imposture” or deceive such outsiders as British or Austrian millionaires. However, his knowledge of wine is sincere,honest and true. So much so that he takes a sense of pride in it, and it is this pride that Montresor will use against him in order to enact his revenge. |
| What evidence from Poe’s writing builds a mood of suspense in the conversation between Montresor and Fortunato? | Poe has made the reader aware that Montresor seeks revenge and plans to use Fortunato’s knowledge of wine in order to get his [Montresor’s] way. With this knowledge, the reader sees an exchange where Fortunato *insists* on going down into Montresor’s wine vaults with him to try this wine. It is as if he will not take no for an answer, even when Montresor hesitates on more than one occasion. In effect, the reader watches as Fortunato leads himself to his own doom. |
| During Fortunato’s coughing fit, Montresor insists they return to the festival, as he is worried about the cold and damp surroundings making Fortunato ill. Fortunato responds by saying, “Enough...the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough.” What is ironic about these lines?  Teacher Note: Check in with students to be sure that they understand the meaning of irony if they struggle with this question. | Once again, Fortunato insists on going on, while Montresor is the one trying to get him to turn back. Beyond this, his declaration and repetition that his cough “will not kill” him and he “shall not die of a cough” are chilling in their delivery. He does not realize how close he is to his death and how right he is that it will not be his cough that will kill him. |
| What sensory details does Poe provide to help you visualize the setting? What mood does he succeed in creating? | The two men “passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling.” We can assume these bones are human remains, and from the footnote, we know that “casks and puncheons” are storage containers for wine. So, the wine and bones are sitting side-by-side, which produces an unsettling juxtaposition. In addition, Montresor calls attention to the niter that “hangs like moss upon the vaults.” It’s almost as if the niter is a king of cobwebs. Lastly, the “drops of moisture” from the river “trickle among the bones.” Like the wine and the bones, the water and the bones intermingle, as if there is no longer a clear distinction between the living and the dead. These details and the feelings they produce help to create an eerie and sinister mood. |
| What specific details lead you to understand how intoxicated Fortunato is? How does his state help Montresor chain him to the wall? | “The gait of my friend was unsteady”  “[L]ooked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication”  “The wine sparkled in his eyes”  “His eyes flashed with a fierce light”  His unsteady and “grotesque” movements  “[H]e stepped unsteadily forward”  Because he’s so drunk, he doesn’t realize what’s happening until it’s too late: “He was too much astounded to resist”  All of these details help the reader understand Fortunato’s state of intoxication and because he is so intoxicated he is unable to recognize his imbedding doom and is unable to resist. |
| “The noise lasted for several minutes” (“...threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within”). What details make this description especially horrifying? | “The noise lasted for...and sat down upon the bones.” In order to better listen to and enjoy Fortunato’s struggling, Montresor stops his work. Not only does he get satisfaction from the noise, but he chooses to listen to it while resting upon the bones, making the image even more chilling. Beyond this, Montresor stops his work again to throw “a few feeble rays upon the figure within.” In addition to wanting to hear Fortunato’s struggle, now he wants to see it. It is important to note, that he simply refers to him as a “figure” now, taking away his human qualities and evoking a feeling of horror. |
| How would you describe Montresor’s and Fortunato’s final interaction? What mood does Poe leave lingering with these lines? | In a sad voice that Montresor doesn’t even recognize as Fortunato’s, the reader hears Fortunato try in vain to plea for his freedom. He jests that this was a good joke, but it is getting late. With this final words, “For the love of God, Montresor”, the reader can hear his last moment of misery. But Montresor takes no pity on the man and simply repeats his words back to him. This coldness leaves the reader with a sense of twisted and cold finality. |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | borne, avenged, precluded, connoisseurship  afflicted, absconded  gait, imbedded  remote  termination, feeble  implore, render, obstinate  aperture | impunity, immolation, accosted  repose  recess |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | impose  catacombs, leer  recoiling | retribution, imposture  arms  grotesque  promiscuously  niche, bewildered |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt

*Compose an argument that describes the mood Poe is able to create and sustain in “The Cask of Amontillado” through his use of dialogue and sensory details. Your claims should be supported with specific evidence from the text, as well as clear reasoning that explains and connects your evidence to your argument.*

* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should remind students to use any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions.

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “As you are engaged, I am on my way...”  “Come, let us go”  “My friend, no...”  “Let us go nevertheless...Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm.” | Fortunato insists on going down into Montresor’s wine vaults with him to try this wine. It is as if he will not take no for an answer, even when Montresor hesitates on more than one occasion. In effect, the reader watches as Fortunato leads himself to his own doom. This kind of dramatic irony creates suspense and a mood of apprehension. |
| “Come...we will go back; your health is precious...You are a man to be missed...and I cannot be responsible”  “Enough...the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die from a cough.” | Montresor implores Montresor to leave the vaults with him on account of his cough. He recognizes the frailty of his health, but also the idea that others would miss him if something were to happen, and he could not bear to be the cause of that. Fortunato’s response adds to these ironic undertones, when he declares that a cough will not be the thing to kill him. This exchange presents Fortunato with another opportunity to dodge his fateful death, yet he is blind to it and insists on continuing. This fact and irony add to the chilling mood Poe continues to construct. |
| The two men “passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling.”  In addition, Montresor calls attention to the niter that “hangs like moss upon the vaults.” It’s almost as if the niter is a king of cobweb. Lastly, the “drops of moisture” from the river “trickle among the bones.” | We can assume these bones are human remains, and from the footnote, we know that “casks and puncheons” are storage containers for wine. So, the wine and bones are sitting side-by-side, which produces an unsettling juxtaposition. Like the wine and the bones, the water and the bones intermingle, as if there is no longer a clear distinction between the living and the dead. These details and the feelings they produce help to create an eerie and sinister mood. |
| “The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with more the satisfaction, I ceased my labors and set down upon the bones.” | The image of Montresor stopping his work in order to rest upon the remains of other humans and listen to the struggle of the human who is chained but still alive at the end of the passageway is chilling. It greatly blurs the line between death and life, right and wrong, and adds to the sinister mood. |
| “I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.” | In addition to wanting to hear Fortunato’s struggle, Montresor wants to see it. These unsettling desires compound the sinister mood and emphasize Montresor’s unstable frame of mind. |
| During their last exchange, Montresor merely repeats back the last two things Fortunato says to him. | Montresor’s lack of emotional response to Fortunato’s final plea conveys a sense of finality and a sense that this chilling mood has turned into a chilling reality. The deed is done, and there is no going back. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

“The Cask of Amontillado” is a hair-raising tale that follows one man’s twisted plot for revenge. Although carnival season is in full-swing above ground, Fortunato finds himself being lead to his death below ground. His past insults will ensure that he will never again participate in such feasts and merriment; Montresor will make sure of that. As if the story’s premise was not eerie enough, Edgar Allen Poe uses specific sensory details and descriptions and carefully constructed dialogue to produce a mood that is both chilling and horrifying.

Throughout the story, Poe uses dialogue as a means of moving the action forward and producing a gut-wrenching and chilling mood. For example, after readers learn of Montresor’s motives, they are confronted with the first exchange between Montresor and Fortunato. Montresor explains about the Amontillado and he references going to meet with another man for his opinion since Fortunato is already “engaged.” Here, Montresor gives his first reason for not wanting to disturb Fortunato: he is busy. Yet Fortunato insists, saying, “Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry...Come, let us go...to your vaults.” However, Montresor insists he could not “impose upon [Fortunato’s] good nature.” But flattery will not stop Fortunato, and he insists on going. So, Montresor produces yet another reason for not wanting to take Fortunato: “[T]he severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp.” But Fortunato pays no attention to the concern for his health and simply takes Montresor’s arm, says they must go nevertheless, and leads him in a hurry to his house. It is this kind of dialogue, overflowing with dramatic irony, that creates a chilling and ominous mood. Although Montresor is the mastermind of the plan, it is as though Fortunato is the one to move the action forward through the dialogue. He is the one to drive the notion home that they *must* go to the vaults to taste this wine. His insistence ultimately leads to a fate the reader already knows should be feared.

Another such example of Poe’s purposeful use of dialogue happens again partway through the two men’s journey, when Montresor implores Fortunato to turn back when his cough worsens. Ironically, Montresor says, “Come...we will go back; your health is precious...You are a man to be missed...I cannot be responsible”. Here, we see him cultivate the seed he has already planted in Fortunato’s mind: He cares about his health and does not want to be responsible for him getting sick or worse. The choice of words here is important to note. Not only does Montresor explain that Fortunato’s health is precious, but he recognizes that others will miss him if something were to happen to him. Beyond this assurance, he declares that he could never be responsible for such a thing. Although his seemingly sincere concerns fall on Fortunato’s deaf ears, they do not go unnoticed by readers. On the contrary, they sit heavy on readers’ minds, bringing back that ominous mood. Fortunato’s response in this conversation only serves to heighten this mood, when he ironically replies, “the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough”.

Not only does Poe use dialogue to carefully create and sustain this chilling and ominous mood, but he also uses sensory details to do so. For instance, the eerie descriptions of the surroundings are almost palpable: They “passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs.” Readers can assume these bones are human remains, which means the storage containers of wine and human bones are sitting side-by-side, simply lining the walls of where the two men are walking. Not only does this create an unsettling juxtaposition and image, but Montresor goes on to point out that the niter “hangs like moss upon the vaults” and the “drops of moisture” from the riverbed “trickle among the bones”. Like the wine and the bones, the water and the bones freely intermingle. There is no distinction between the two, and with this readers start to get a sense that the distinction between life and death is blurred, as well. Such a chilling realization furthers Poe’s ability to maintain this ominous mood. This blurred line between life and death shows up again when Montresor takes a break from his masonry to sit on some of the human bones and listen to Fortunato’s struggle. It is no mistake that Montresor sits on the bones rather than the ground, for instance. Rather, Poe is calculating in his choice to have Montresor rest on the bones, again, taking this line between life and death and showing Montresor has no regard for distinguishing between the two. Rather, he forces them to mingle, much like the way the wine and bones mingle and the riverbed moisture and bones mingle. Now, too, Montresor and the bones mingle. And Fortunato’s cries and the catacombs mingle.

It is descriptions and exchanges like those outlined above that allow Poe to succeed in creating and maintaining a sinister and ominous mood throughout his story, “The Cask of Amontillado.” These two means of characterization, dialogue and sensory details, work effortlessly to keep readers chilled and fearful of just the kind of fate Montresor has in store for Fortunato.

Additional Tasks

* *Have students define the following forms of irony: verbal, situational, and dramatic. Then, have them locate at least two examples of each from the story.*

Answer:

Verbal irony: Contrasts between what is said and what is meant.

Examples: “My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met”; mason pun when Montresor produces the trowel when Fortunato asks him if he belongs to the Society of Masons; Rest in peace

Situational irony: Situation in which actions have opposite outcomes from what was intended or expected.

Examples: Carnival season going on above ground while Fortunato is leading himself to his own death below ground; Taking pleasure out of listening to Fortunato’s struggle

Dramatic irony: The audience is aware of some truth that the character(s) are not.

Examples: Montresor’s motives; “The cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. It shall not die of a cough”

Note to Teacher

* Instruct students to pay close attention to footnotes and definitions in the margins while reading. This will save time when it comes to explaining unfamiliar terms and phrases.