

# The Black Cat

**Directions:** On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions. To receive credit, you must write complete, thoughtful sentences.

1. As the story opens, the narrator is in jail, awaiting his execution on the following day. Find and write down two of the lines from the story that show this is true.

2. The narrator tells us that he never had any troubles until he began drinking alcohol, yet there is evidence in the story that alcohol isn't the only thing to blame for his sociopathic actions. Describe other things we learn about the author that likely contributed to his slide into violence and insanity.

3. Interestingly, the narrator capitalizes certain nouns, such as Fiend Intemperance, Gin, Rum, Alcohol, and Horror. Why, do you suppose, Poe does this? What does the capitalization show us about the narrator's state of mind?

4. Poe's story features a heavy use of dashes to create long, cumbersome sentences as we hear the fragmentation of the narrator's thoughts in his voice. This technique, which probably distracted you a bit as you read the story, is done for a purpose. Why would Poe use this technique?

5. The narrator says that he is certain that "perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart – one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man.

Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is Law, merely because we understand it to be such?" First, rephrase the narrator's point in just one sentence. Then, give an example from our modern world or your own life that illustrates the narrator's point.

6. Look closely at the passages involving the narrator's original household, the fire, and the impoverished dwelling/damp cellar at the end of the tale. Symbolically, how might these three elements be connected to show a larger message about the narrator's mental state?

7. Write down two of the adjectives the narrator uses to describe his wife. Why did the narrator kill her? How would you respond to someone who argued that this story trivializes domestic violence?

8. The narrator believes that the second cat is the reason he's captured, but the reader knows this isn't true. What's the real reason the narrator is caught and convicted?

9. Do you think there were two cats or just one? Justify your answer.

10. Finally, there are several types of blindness on display in this story. Obviously, the two cats were partially blind, but the narrator also suffered from a sort of blindness. How so? What warning might Poe be trying to deliver to the audience in this story? (Hint: It's a much-deeper point than simply advising people not to hurt animals or their spouses. Dig deep in your thinking.)

