

Vocabulary Study
The Tell-Tale Heart by Edgar Allan Poe

Note: The words in each section are listed in alphabetical order. The words, definitions, and quotations are presented in the order in which they appear in Ghostly Tales and Eerie Poems of Edgar Allan Poe, Grosset and Dunlap, 1993.

List 1

acute
conceived
cunningly
dissimulation
extent

foresight
inquiring
object
proceeded
profound

1. **acute** (uh-kyoot) *adj.* sensitive to details; keen

derivatives: acutely, acuteness

“The disease had sharpened my sense—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing **acute.**”

2. **conceived** (kuhn-seevd) *v.* to form an idea; think

derivatives: conceive, conceiving

“It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once **conceived**, it haunted me day and night.”

3. **object** (ob-jekt) *n.* the end toward which effort or action is directed; goal; purpose

derivatives: objective

“**Object** there was none.”

4. **proceeded** (pruh-seev-ed) *v.* to go on to do something

derivatives: proceed, proceeding

“You should have seen how wisely I **proceeded**—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work!”

5. **foresight** (fohr-sahyt) *n.* care or provision for the future; provident care; prudence

derivatives: foresighted, foresightedly, foresightedness, foresightful

“You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what **foresight**—with what dissimulation I went to work!”

6. **dissimulation** (dih-sim-yuh-ley-shuhn) *n.* the act of concealing one’s true motives, thoughts, etc., by some pretense; feigning; hypocrisy

derivatives: dissimulate, dissimulative, dissimulator

“You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what **dissimulation** I went to work!”

7. **cunningly** (kuhn-ing-ly) *adv.* 1. a skill performed in a shrewd or sly manner, as in deceiving; craftiness; guile. 2. performed with adeptness; dexterity

derivatives: cunning, cunningness

“Oh, you would have laughed to see how **cunningly** I thrust it in!”

8. **inquiring** (in-kwahyr-ing) *v.* to seek information by questioning; ask

derivatives: inquire, inquired, enquire, inquirer, inquirable

“And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and **inquiring** how he had passed the night.”

9. **profound** (pruh-found) *adj.* 1. having deep insight or understanding. 2. being or going far beneath what is superficial, external, or obvious

derivatives: profounder, profoundest, profoundly, profoundness

“So you see he would have been a very **profound** old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.”

10. **extent** (ik-stent) *n.* the space or degree to which a thing extends; length, area, volume, or scope

derivatives: none

“Never before that night, had I *felt* the **extent** of my own powers—of my sagacity.”

List 2

concealment	scantlings
dismembered	stalked
hearkening	suppositions
mark	unperceived
sagacity	waned

1. **sagacity** (suh-gas-i-tee) *n.* acuteness of mental discernment and soundness of judgment

derivatives: sage, sagacious

“Never before that night, had I *felt* the extent of my own powers—of my **sagacity**.”

2. **hearkening** (hahr-kuhn) *v.* to listen to; hear

derivatives: hearken, hark

“He was still sitting up in the bed listening; —just as I have done, night after night, **hearkening** to the death watches in the wall.”

3. **suppositions** (suhp-uh-zish-uhn) *n.* something that is supposed; assumption; hypothesis

derivative: supposition

“Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these **suppositions**; but he had found all in vain.”

4. **stalked** (stawkt) *v.* to proceed in a steady, deliberate, or sinister manner

derivative: stalk, stalking

“*All in vain*; because Death, in approaching him, had **stalked** with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim.”

5. **unperceived** (uhn-per-seevd) *v.* to not be aware of, to not know or identify by means of the senses

derivatives: perceive

“And it was the mournful influence of the **unperceived** shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to *feel* the presence of my head within the room.”

6. **mark** (mahrk) *v.* to take notice; give attention; consider

derivatives: marked, marking

“It grew louder, I say, louder every moment!—do you **mark** me well?”

7. **concealment** (kuhn-seel-muhnt) *n.* the act of hiding; to withdraw or remove from observation; to cover or keep from sight

derivatives: conceal, concealable

“If you still think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the **concealment** of the body.”

8. **waned** (weynd) *v.* to draw to a close; approach an end

derivatives: wane, waning

“The night **waned**, and I worked hastily, but in silence.”

9. **dismembered** (dis-mem-berd) *v.* 1. to deprive of limbs; divide limb from limb. 2. to divide into parts; cut to pieces; mutilate

derivatives: dismember, dismemberment

“First of all I **dismembered** the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.”

10. **scantlings** (skant-lings) *n.* timbers of relatively slight width and thickness, as a stud or rafter in a house frame

derivatives: scantling

“I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the **scantlings**.”

List 3

audacity

derision

ere

gesticulations

manner

raved

reposed

suavity

vehemently

wary

1. **wary** (**wair**-ee) *adj.* 1. watchful; being on one's guard against danger. 2. arising from or characterized by caution

derivatives: warier, wariest, warily, wariness

"There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood-spot whatever. I had been too **wary** for that."

2. **suavity** (**swah**-vi-tee) *n.* smoothly agreeable or courteous actions or manners

derivatives: suavities, suave

"There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect **suavity**, as officers of the police."

3. **audacity** (**aw-das**-i-tee) *n.* 1. boldness or daring, especially with confident or arrogant disregard for personal safety, conventional thought or other restrictions. 2. effrontery or insolence; shameless boldness

derivatives: audacities, audacious

"I brought chairs into the room, and desired them *here* to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild **audacity** of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim."

4. **reposed** (**ri-pohzd**) *v.* to lie dead

derivatives: repose, reposing

"I brought chairs into the room, and desired them *here* to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which **reposed** the corpse of the victim."

5. **manner** (**man-er**) *n.* a person's outward bearing; way of speaking to and treating others

derivatives: none

"The officers were satisfied. My **manner** had convinced them."

6. **ere** (**air**) *preposition, conjunction* before

derivatives: none

"But, **ere** long, I felt myself growing pale and wished them gone."

7. **vehemently** (**vee-uh-muhnt-lee**) *adv.* in a manner that is strongly emotional; intense or passionate

derivatives: vehement

"I talked more quickly—more **vehemently**; but the noise steadily increased."

8. **gesticulations** (**je-stik-yuh-ley-shuhnz**) *n.* animated or excited gestures

derivatives: gesticulation, gesticulate

"I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent **gesticulations**; but the noise steadily increased."

9. **raved** (**reyvd**) *v.* 1. to talk wildly, as in delirium 2. to utter as if in madness

derivatives: rave, raving

"I foamed—I **raved**—I swore!"

10. **derision** (**dih-rizh-uhn**) *n.* ridicule; mockery

derivatives: derisible

"Anything was more tolerable than this **derision**!"

Fill-in-the-Blank Activity
The Tell-Tale Heart

Using the words below, fill in the blanks with suitable vocabulary choices. Each word or its derivative is used once.

List 1

acute	foresight
conceived	inquiring
cunningly	object
dissimulation	proceeded
extent	profound

1. The narrator's sense of hearing is so _____ that he is able to hear bugs in the walls.
2. Ridding himself of the old man's eye becomes the narrator's main _____, which he can only accomplish by taking the old man's life.
3. Once the narrator _____ a plan to kill the old man, he is anxious to carry it out.
4. Without hesitation, he _____ into the old man's room while he is sleeping.
5. With great _____ the narrator pretends to care about the old man.
6. With feigned interest in the old man's health, he was _____ about his master's sleeping habits every morning.
7. The more the narrator denies his madness, the more the reader begins to realize the _____ of his mental illness.
8. He plans the murder with _____, taking precautions against getting caught.
9. _____, he sneaks into the old man's chamber every night without waking him.

10. The old man is not _____ enough to recognize that the narrator is a threat to him.

List 2

concealment
dismembered
hearkening
mark
sagacity

scantlings
stalked
suppositions
unperceived
waned

1. The narrator thrusts his head through a crack in the door, _____ for the sound of the old man's breathing.
2. After seven nights of having _____ the old man in his room, the narrator finally sees the Evil Eye glaring in the darkness.
3. The sound that awakens the old man is so faint that it is almost _____ by the old man.
4. What the narrator insists is great _____ the reader realizes is increasing insanity.
5. The old man's heart beats steadily, but once he was covered by the mattress, it _____ until it beat no more.
6. The narrator wants the reader to _____ how carefully he planned and executed his crime.
7. When he _____ the body, the narrator is careful not to leave even a trace of blood.
8. Because the body is in _____ under the floor, the narrator has no fear of his crime being discovered by the investigating police officers.
9. After he replaces the _____ in the floor, three men come knocking at the door.
10. Upon hearing a shriek in the night, the neighbors form the _____ that something dangerous had happened in the house.

List 3

audacity	raved
derision	reposed
ere	suavity
gesticulations	vehemently
manner	wary

1. Because the narrator has nothing to fear, he practices _____ and is courteous when speaking to the police.
2. The _____ of leading the police to the very room and sitting his chair over the very spot where the corpse is hidden ultimately proves his undoing.
3. The _____ in which the narrator speaks to the police begins quite calmly and confidently.
4. The narrator's tone shifts as he imagines a heart beating, even though the corpse is _____ underneath the floor.
5. As the perceived heartbeat becomes louder, the narrator becomes more emotional, speaking _____ in order to distract the police from the noise he heard.
6. The wild _____ the narrator makes with his hands only make him seem more insane.
7. The narrator assumes the police are treating him with _____, but actually they are sincerely clueless.
8. As the narrator _____ and became louder and louder, the suspense in the story builds.
9. _____ the police know it, the narrator is confessing to a murder of which they had been unaware.

10. Despite being _____ to attempt to avoid being caught, the narrator confesses his crime.

Multiple Choice Exam
“The Tell-Tale Heart”

1. foresight
 - a. prudence
 - b. anticipation
 - c. preoccupation
 - d. foreboding
 - e. understanding
2. acute
 - a. obtuse
 - b. keen
 - c. triangular
 - d. pretty
 - e. passionate
3. object
 - a. confrontation
 - b. mineral
 - c. goal
 - d. impartial
 - e. disliked
4. dissimulation
 - a. concealment
 - b. disclosure
 - c. supposition
 - d. gesticulation
 - e. derision
5. cunningly
 - a. mischievously
 - b. slippery
 - c. secretly
 - d. craftily
 - e. confidentially
6. inquiring
 - a. asking
 - b. explaining
 - c. appealing
 - d. demanding
 - e. soliciting
7. sagacity
 - a. painfully
 - b. herbal
 - c. epic
 - d. foolishness
 - e. wisdom
8. profound
 - a. sneaky
 - b. optimistic
 - c. mind-reader
 - d. bored
 - e. penetrating
9. hearkening
 - a. ignoring
 - b. singing
 - c. scratching
 - d. listening
 - e. sleeping
10. suppositions
 - a. conversations
 - b. hypotheses
 - c. suggestions
 - d. vexations
 - e. actualities

11. stalked

- a. inquired
- b. pursued
- c. attended
- d. filmed
- e. concealed

12. mark

- a. mutilate
- b. paint
- c. discharge
- d. consider
- e. ignore

13. unperceived

- a. discerned
- b. unknown
- c. observable
- d. immoral
- e. detected

14. suavity

- a. cleanliness
- b. audacity
- c. smoothness
- d. clarity
- e. charisma

15. concealment

- a. the act of revealing
- b. the act of withholding
- c. the act of giving
- d. the act of hiding
- e. the act of lying

16. waned

- f. darkened
- g. ended
- h. complained
- i. moonlight
- j. began

17. dismembered

- a. forgotten
- b. connected
- c. multiplied
- d. mutilated
- e. dreamed

18. wary

- a. aware
- b. old
- c. cautious
- d. quiet
- e. sober

19. audacity

- a. boldness
- b. excitement
- c. smoothness
- d. profoundness
- e. trepidation

20. manner

- a. appearance
- b. peculiarities
- c. behavior
- d. courtesy
- e. correctness

21. vehemently

- a. apathetically
- b. observably
- c. humbly
- d. emotionally
- e. viciously

22. gesticulations

- a. gestures
- b. words
- c. guesses
- d. dissimulations
- e. suppositions

23. raved

- a. partied wildly
- b. whispered softly
- c. considered carefully
- d. spoke deliriously
- e. criticized mildly

24. derision

- a. mockery
- b. division
- c. separation
- d. complimentary
- e. satire

25. proceeded

- a. bought
- b. began
- c. donated
- d. happened
- e. pre-calculated

Writing Activity

“The Tell-Tale Heart” is a chilling story of a senseless, random murder. The narrator insists throughout the story that he is perfectly sane. In a well-developed essay, agree or disagree with the narrator’s claim that he is not insane. Support that position with reasons and evidence from the text, including the excerpts provided below.

True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

If you still think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three plans from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye—not even *his*—could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all—ha! ha!

[The heartbeat] grew louder—louder—*louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected!—they *knew!*—they were making a mockery of my horror!—this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no long! I felt that I must scream or die! And now—again!—hark! louder! louder! louder! *louder!*