

# AMULET BOOKS TEACHING GUIDE



## INTRODUCTION

Cat Winters's *The Raven's Tale* is a well-researched, historically accurate portrayal of Edgar Allan Poe's adolescent years. Students may be surprised to learn that while Poe is most often cited as the great Gothic writer of mystery and horror, he was a typical teenager! His youth, marked by tragedy and conflict, likely influenced his writing, but he was an athlete, a satirist, and a risk-taker, too.

While Winters has thoroughly researched Poe's childhood and adolescence, this isn't a biography. She has woven in scenes of Gothic fantasy to pay homage to the creative muses who inspired Poe and stoked his talent. *The Raven's Tale* will transport students to antebellum Richmond, the University of Virginia, and finally a booming Boston while introducing them to one of America's greatest writers during the turbulence of adolescence.

## MAIN CHARACTERS

### Real

**EDGAR ALLAN POE** was orphaned before he turned three and taken in by the Allan family of Richmond, Virginia. Poe is particularly well known for his macabre poems and short stories. In *The Raven's Tale* he often goes by his nickname, Eddie.

**ROSALIE POE** is Poe's younger biological sister. She lived with the Mackenzie family in Richmond after the death of her parents.

**SARAH ELMIRA ROYSTER** is Poe's neighbor and secret fiancée. He proposes to her before leaving for Richmond. Her father intercepts the letters they send each other and arranges for her engagement to another young man before Poe returns to Richmond.

**FRANCES KEELING VALENTINE ALLAN (MA)** is Poe's foster mother. She loves Poe and encourages his writing, despite her husband's protest. She is often unwell.

**JOHN ALLAN (PA)** is Poe's foster father. He forbids Poe to write poems and stories and threatens to cut him off if he succumbs to the temptation of his muse. He sends Poe to the University of Virginia but fails to provide enough money to cover the required fees. When Poe can't cover the cost of his schooling, he is forced to return to Richmond and work in the counting room of his foster father's tobacco company.

**JUDITH, DABNEY, AND JIM** were the slaves that worked in the Allan household. Judith is often credited with inspiring Poe's interest in the supernatural.

**JANE STITH CRAIG STANARD** is the mother of Poe's friend Robert Stanard. She encouraged Poe's creativity and emboldened him to write. His poem "To Helen" is inspired by her.

**MILES GEORGE, WILLIAM BURWELL, UPTON BEALL** are friends that Poe met at the University of Virginia.

## MAIN CHARACTERS

### Supernatural

**LENORE** is Poe's first muse. She is first described as a girl with gray skin and long, hooked nails; she must feed on his writing to evolve and survive. She encourages him to write his poems and share his talent even when others forbid it or are horrified by his words. She eventually begins to evolve into a raven as Poe writes and shares his poems.

**GARLAND O'PEALE** is Poe's second muse that he meets at UVA. Garland O'Peale (an anagram of Edgar Allan Poe) is focused on encouraging Poe's talent in satire and literary criticism instead of the macabre. He finds himself in direct conflict with Lenore and eventually leaves Poe for one of his friends. He returns to Poe when he realizes he cannot thrive as someone else's muse.

**MORELLA** is Judith's muse. Morella takes the form of a screech owl and advises Lenore at Moldavia.

## SETTINGS

### RICHMOND, VA

Edgar Allan Poe grew up in antebellum Richmond, Virginia, after the death of his parents. During the nineteenth century the city evolved and grew; it was built by the slaves who were brought there. Poe lived in a home called Moldavia before enrolling at the University of Virginia in 1826. According to records, Moldavia was built at Fifth and Main Streets in Richmond and was directly across the street from the Royster home.

### UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Founded in 1819 by Thomas Jefferson, the University of Virginia, located in Charlottesville, welcomed its first class in 1825. Poe enrolled in 1826 and pursued a study of languages. The university was unlike others at the time because it was secular and allowed students to pursue a variety of courses. Poe's classmates were a mix of aristocratic young men and students like Poe, who struggled to pay his fees. The students regularly defied the rules, drinking and brawling on the lawn and even gambling.

### BOSTON

A newly chartered city in the 1820s, Boston was a bustling place full of ideas and innovation when Poe returned in 1827. He began his career as a published author at age eighteen when his debut book of poetry, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, was published by eighteen-year-old printer Calvin F.S. Thomas.

## PRE-READING IDEAS

1. Introduce students to some of the elements of Gothic literature:

- |  |                       |           |
|--|-----------------------|-----------|
| ♦ dark, gloomy setting                           | ♦ curses/prophecies   | ♦ heroes  |
| ♦ supernatural creatures like ghosts or vampires | ♦ damsels in distress | ♦ romance |

Ask students why humanity has often been fascinated by horror stories. What elements of Gothic stories do they find most terrifying? What television shows and books might be considered Gothic today?

2. Poe's biological parents both died before he turned three years old, leaving him to be raised by the Allan family. How might losing his parents at such an early age have influenced Poe and his writing? After reading *The Raven's Tale*, have students look back at this list of Gothic elements and discuss how his early life might have influenced his interest in the macabre.

## GUIDED READING IDEAS

1. In chapters two and three, Poe learns that his “artistic aspirations might not simply stop Pa from sending me to the university next week, but they might also impede me from both marriage and heaven (p. 18).” Ask students to think about a time when their future plans and aspirations might have been judged by others. Have students share their experiences in writing or in a class discussion.
2. John Allan tells Poe that he won’t pay for Poe’s university schooling if he continues writing poems. He says that his son must pursue his studies with the goal of finding a job that can pay the bills, and writing poems will only lead him to life as a pauper. Why do you think he feels so strongly about this? Why do you think Poe feels so strongly about pursuing his artistic aspirations?
3. The nine muses of Greek mythology, deities who inspired creativity, were often described as having divine beauty. When she is introduced, Lenore is described as having “a dress made of soot and black feathers. . . . Her narrow sleeves and dress drip with shadows that plunk against the floorboards to the same anxious rhythms as the rain’s tap, tap, tapping. Her eyes glimmer with firelight, her maroon lips match my wallpaper; her hair hangs to her waist in tangles of inky black curls. Her skin is the dismal grey of ashes, and I gulp in response to her nails—long, and hooked and metallic (p. 26).” Why do you think his muse isn’t described as having divine beauty? What would your muse look like?
4. *The Raven’s Tale* is full of macabre characters, including spirits, muses, and ghosts. Poe’s most famous poems and stories often focus on death and spirits. Have you ever experienced something supernatural? Do you believe in supernatural beings? Why or why not?
5. Most people know Poe from his writing. What many people don’t realize is that he was also a typical teenage boy. Using details from the book, compare Poe to a modern teen. What might he have in common with you and your classmates?
6. How would you describe the relationship between Poe and Lenore? Use details from the book to support your thinking.
7. In chapters nineteen through twenty-one, Poe is introduced to Garland O’Peale, a second muse. Why does this second muse appear?
8. Garland promises to be a better muse than Lenore by helping Poe write satire and literary criticism. While Poe is best known for his macabre writing today, he was a gifted satirist and literary critic in his time. Why do you think his poems and short stories receive the most attention today? Do you think most artists are gifted in more than one type of art or more than one genre?
9. What is the symbolism of Poe having two muses?
10. Poe tells Mr. Wertenbaker, the librarian, that his mother died in the Richmond Theater Fire of 1811. Why does he tell this lie?
11. In chapter forty-four, Poe arrives home and immediately goes across the street to see his beloved Elmira. What does he discover when he arrives at her home? How does he react?

## GUIDED READING IDEAS

12. On pages 282–284, Poe repeats a metaphor about the slow crawl of time when he is not writing and must work for his father. He says,

*“Whenever I’m not writing, time trudges forward with the maddening pace of a funeral procession.”*

*“Whenever I’m not writing, time trudges forward with the maddening, mortifying pace of a funeral procession.”*

*“Whenever I’m not writing, time trudges forward with the maddening, mortifying, miserable pace of a funeral procession.”*

In each instance he uses alliteration, repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of words placed near each other, to make the metaphor more powerful. When does time move slowly for you? How would you describe it? Using the sentences above as mentors, compose your own metaphor using alliteration to help others picture just how slow time moves.

13. In chapter forty-eight, John Allan and Poe argue over their different definitions of success. How does John Allan define success? What about Poe? Have you and your parents ever butted heads over similar issues? Discuss as a class.
14. Throughout the book John Allan encourages Poe to kill his muse. Why does he do this even though he wrote poetry as a young man?
15. In chapter fifty-four, Poe buries Lenore. After this, he doesn’t write a word until Garland O’Peale shows up on his doorstep in Boston. Garland tells Poe that Lenore didn’t die. He says, “You can’t bury a muse in the ground, Poe. She’s either gone for good or you’re ignoring her . . . again!” Why does Garland bring Poe to a printer’s shop after this conversation? What does Poe decide to do? Why?
16. At the end of the novel, author Cat Winters includes a list of poems, songs, letters, and stories. Some of these were written by Winters in the style of Poe’s writing, but many are also Poe’s original lines. Choose one of the lines originally written by Poe and explain how it fits into the events of the chapter. Why did Winters choose to use these particular lines? How do they improve the scene they are included in?

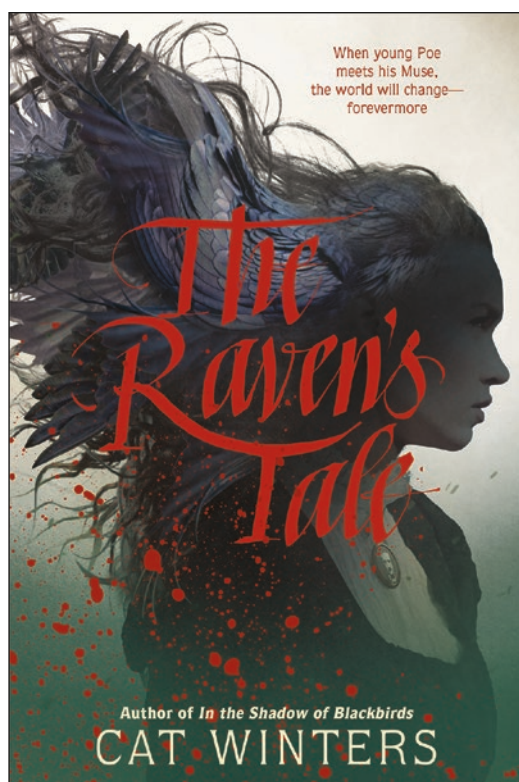
## CLASSROOM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. In chapter one, Reverend Bishop Moore delivers a sermon criticizing those who allow themselves to be tempted by the creative arts. This argument is still made today when we talk about the liberal arts and STEM. STEAM, the integration of STEM and the arts, is a new focus for many schools and programs. Have students research how STEM and the arts complement each other, and then create a poster sharing what they have learned. Hang up the posters around your school.
2. Cat Winters includes lines from a number of poems, songs, letters, and stories within the pages of *The Raven's Tale*. Using the text from a page in the book, challenge students to create a blackout poem with Gothic traits. Alternately, have students create a found poem using text from *A Raven's Tale*.
3. Garland O'Peale is an anagram of Edgar Allan Poe. Have students sketch a picture of what they think their muse looks like. Then have them create a name for the muse using an anagram of their name.
4. Poe spends a lot of time outside in the novel, and so does Lenore. Bring your students outdoors and allow them to observe for a few minutes. Remind them to use their five senses as they observe. They should write down their observations and might even collect some ephemera like grass or flowers. Ask students to compose a poem using their observations. Finished poems can be typed up or shared in another way. You might even give the students chalk and allow them to write their poems on pavement around the school!
5. In chapter fourteen, Lenore swallows John Allan's imitation of Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18." Share the sonnet with students. Explain that Shakespeare's sonnets have fourteen lines (three quatrains and a couplet) and follow an ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme. "Sonnet 18" is one of Shakespeare's most well-known sonnets. The speaker begins by comparing his friend to a summer's day. After reading the poem together, ask students to use Shakespeare's first line as inspiration and write their own imitations.
6. Poe enrolls in the University of Virginia only a few months after the first classes begin. Have students research the University of Virginia. What made it different from other colleges at that time? Why might Poe have been attracted to such a school?
7. When Poe meets his classmates at UVA, some of them have already heard about how he is "famous for chasing a bastard out of town when said bastard insulted him (p. 135)." It's true that Poe was a gifted satirist. In fact, on page 148 Garland O'Peale says, "You're meant to be a satirist and literary critic. Your destiny isn't love poems and nonsensical tales of the grotesque." Lenore, on the other hand, encourages Poe to "embrace your Gothic art (p. 188)." Ask students why they think Poe's more macabre poems and stories are his legacy today. What might this say about our literary interests?
8. Lenore encourages Poe to finish "To Helen," the poem inspired by his friend Robert Standard's mother Jane. Jane had helped cultivate Poe's talent before her death. Have students write a short poem or paragraph to express thanks to someone in their life who has supported their dreams. Encourage them to share their writing with that person.
9. Throughout the story Lenore evolves into a raven-like girl. Have students create a drawing of Lenore based on the descriptions in the book.
10. What is the symbolism of Lenore's transformation? Have students read Poe's "The Raven." Ask them to describe the mood of the poem. Does the mood share any parallels with Lenore's personality? The last word Lenore utters in the book is "Nevermore!" Why would Cat Winters choose this as Lenore's last word?
11. *A Raven's Tale* ends when Poe embarks on his career as a published writer. Ask your students why they think Winters chose to focus on Poe's adolescence in this book. After a class discussion, have students work in groups to research the adolescence or young adulthood of another figure in history. Students can share their research in the form of a slideshow or poster. How might understanding someone's childhood or adolescence change our perception of them?



# THE RAVEN'S TALE

By Cat Winters



ISBN: 978-1-4197-3362-8      Ages 12 and up

## PRAISE

*"Eerie, macabre, and appropriately esoteric, Winters's story of a mysterious soul will speak to literary teens."*

—Booklist

*"Winters effectively infuses Poe's macabre aesthetic into her fictional retelling of his life. Fans of classic literature will delight."*

—The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

*"A labor of literary love that will appeal to fans of Gothic horror and anyone who has ever had to assuage a determined muse."*

—Kirkus Reviews

*"This well-researched and darkly entertaining tale serves as an excellent introduction to Poe and his classic works."*

—Publishers Weekly

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Cat Winters** is the author of the critically acclaimed young adult novels *Odd & True*, *The Steep and Thorny Way*, *The Cure for Dreaming*, and *In the Shadow of Blackbirds*, which collected three starred reviews and was a finalist for the William C. Morris Award for debut YA fiction. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

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