



Lesson Title: Poe's Narrators: Developing an Argument of Judgment

Burning Question: How can I get students to engage with (and appreciate) a literary text, use critical thinking to analyze and evaluate a narrator, and develop/write an argument of judgment?

Objective/Introduction: In *Teaching Argument Writing* (pp. 49-66), George Hillocks uses a picture of a character to engage students in a discussion that ultimately leads them to make a judgment about whether or not such a person would make a good king. This variation uses one or several short stories by Edgar Allan Poe as a springboard into a similar writing assignment.

Context: This activity was originally developed as part of a longer unit that included many of the stories and poems of Edgar Allan Poe. If students are familiar with more than a single piece in which there is an unstable or untrustworthy narrator, they would have more evidence for their arguments of judgment.

Materials: Copies of any/all of the following stories/poems: "Tell-Tale Heart," "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Black Cat," "The Raven," "Annabel Lee," etc.

Time Span: Variable depending on how many of the stories/poems students are assigned and whether or not the reading is completed during class or at home

Procedures:

1) Read one (or more) of the Poe stories/poems in which a first-person narrator presents an outlandish or horrifying story. [If necessary, clarify literary terms: first-person, narrator (as distinguished from author), mood, effect, etc.]

Discussion:

2) Ask students what they think of the narrator. Have them revisit the text to find details that indicate the sort of man he is.

3) Ask students to define a "good neighbor." List the qualities that would classify a person as such, and ask for examples (and non-examples, which are often easier to generate). Encourage them to justify their responses. Record their thinking. At the end of the discussion, you should have a list of criteria in response to the question. [Examples: Good neighbors are friendly, helpful, tolerant, quiet, protective, honest, thoughtful, stable, good communicator. Good neighbors do not commit murder, hide bodies in their houses, or use drugs. They keep their hallucinations to themselves. They respect privacy.]

4) Work with the class to apply one of their criteria to the narrator of the story/poem. Record their thinking on a three-column chart (claim, evidence, warrant) that includes quotations from the text, like this:

Claim	Evidence – quotation from text	Warrant
The narrator of “Tell-Tale Heart” is unstable.	“I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How then am I mad?”	Anyone who claims to hear things in heaven and hell is probably not in possession of all his senses because normal humans can’t hear such things. It is common knowledge that people who claim to hear things in hell are insane.

5) Put students in groups of three or four and ask them to complete the chart by working with the remaining criteria established by the class.

- a. Determine whether you can use this criterion to come to a judgment about the narrator.
- b. If you can, provide the evidence, the warrant, and any explanation of why the criterion applies on the chart.

6) Students write an argument of judgment (of their own) in response to this prompt: **Consider Poe's first-person narrators ("The Cask of Amontillado," "Tell-Tale Heart," "The Raven," "Annabel Lee," and/or "The Black Cat"). Select one and write an essay in which you make a judgment about whether or not this character can be trusted (as you would trust a good neighbor). Cite evidence from the text (including direct quotations) to support your argument, and include warrants that explain HOW each piece of evidence illustrates your claims.**

Extensions: This chart can be used in almost any setting that requires evaluation of text, drawing conclusions, and supporting those conclusion with evidence from a text.

Rationale: *Common Core Standards RL.9.2, RL.9.3, SL.9.1, SL.9.3, SL.9.4*

Resources:

Hillocks, George. *Teaching Argument Writing*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2011. Print.

Works of Edgar Allan Poe