

The Masque of the Red Death

BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

Before Reading

Summary

The story, published in 1842, is set in the Middle Ages. As a result of the Red Death, a deadly disease that scholars now believe was originally spread by rats, more than half of Prince Prospero's kingdom lies dead. Rather than try to help, however, the prince decides to shut himself in with a thousand friends and live in luxury.

Vocabulary

pestilence—deadly disease.

abbey—building like one belonging to a church.

courtiers—members of a ruler's court.

masked ball—party at which people dress up, wear masks, and dance.

pendulum—weight hung at a central point so that it is free to swing back and forth. A tall clock is often timed by a pendulum.

peculiar—strange.

masquerade—party at which people wear masks and other disguises.

grotesque—ugly, unnatural.

shroud—covering with cloth for the dead.

corpse—dead body.

seize—take hold of suddenly, grasp.

intruder—unwelcome visitor.

dagger—short sword used for stabbing.

(Tested vocabulary used in the online vocabulary quiz is underlined.)

During Reading

Use the **Study Guide** on the next page as a way to work through the selection and improve your comprehension.

After Reading

Answer the questions below as a way to deepen your interpretation of the selection.

1. What is the “Red Death”? How do you think readers in the 1840s responded to such a concept or possibility? Why?
2. What is your reaction to Prince Prospero's plan? Do you consider what happened to him to be a “happy ending”? Why or why not?
3. What contrasts does Poe draw upon to illuminate his story? What elements or imagery did you have the strongest reaction to? Why?
4. What do you think Poe's intentions were in telling this story? What messages, if any, was he trying to convey?

5. Name and explain the 4 motifs used in this story.

Name _____

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Use the Building Comprehension exercise below as a way to improve your comprehension of the selection.

Bio-Poem: Prince Prospero

The activity below is called a Bio-Poem. You're invited to write a poem about Prince Prospero. Your objective is to show the depth of your understanding about his character from "The Masque of the Red Death."

On each line of the poem, provide only the information requested for that line. For lines 3 through 8, begin the line with the words given and supply the information requested in the parentheses. Your objective is to show the depth of your understanding about the character as they've been revealed since the beginning of the story.

Line 1: First name (or title):

Line 2: Four traits that describe the character:

Line 3: Lover of ... (three items, objects, ideas, or people)

Line 4: Who believes... (one concept or idea)

Line 5: Who feels... (three things)

Line 6: Who wants... (three things)

Line 7: Who gives... (three things)

Line 8: Who said... (a direct quote)

Line 9: Last name or description of the character

Line 1: _____

Line 2: _____

Line 3: _____

Line 4: _____

Line 5: _____

Line 6: _____

Line 7: _____

Line 8: _____

Line 9: _____