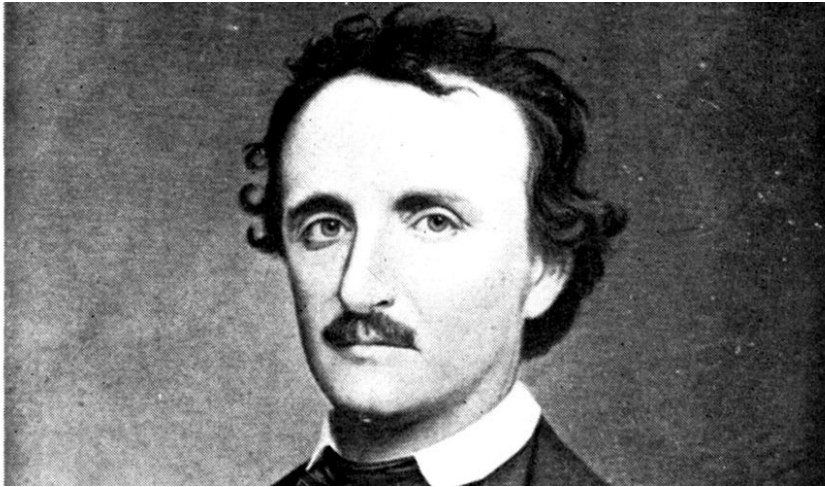


Authors: Edgar Allan Poe

By Biography.com Editors and A+E Networks, adapted by Newsela staff

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Edgar Allan Poe

Synopsis: American short-story writer, poet, critic and editor Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts. Poe created the modern detective story, and wrote tales of horror unrivaled in American fiction. His "The Raven" is one of the best-known poems in national literature.

Early Life

Edgar Allan Poe wrote short stories and poems, and earned an audience of readers all over the world. He came up with new forms of writing, and is often called the "Father of the Detective Story." However, his life is a bit of a mystery, and the lines between fact and fiction have blurred a great deal since his death.

Poe's parents were actors, but he never really knew them. His father left, and his mother died, when Poe was only 3 years old. He was sent to live with John and Frances Allan in Richmond, Virginia. Poe and Frances became close, but he never got along with John, a successful tobacco merchant who valued business skills. Preferring poetry over profits, Poe was said to have written poems on the back of some of Allan's business papers.

Poe and Allan fought over money, and when Poe went to the University of Virginia in 1826, he did not receive enough funds from Allan. Poe gambled to cover the difference, and ended up in debt. Then, he went home to find that the woman that he was going to marry had left him for someone else, so he set out on his own.

A Cutthroat Critic

At first, Poe seemed to be following two different career paths. In 1827, he published his first book, "Tamerlane and Other Poems." He also joined the army around the same time. In 1830, Poe went to West Point, a military academy. But before going, he published a second collection of poems called "Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems." Poe did well with his studies at West Point, but was kicked out after a year for not doing his duties. Some say that Poe wanted to be kicked out. While he was at West Point, he fought with Allan, and his foster father decided to cut ties with him.

Poe then focused just on his writing, and moved around in search of opportunity. He lived in New York City, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Richmond. From 1831 to 1835, he stayed in Baltimore, Maryland, with his aunt, Maria Clemm, and her daughter, Virginia. Poe fell in love with his cousin, and married her in 1836 when she was around 13 years old.

In 1835, Poe went to work for a magazine called the Southern Literary Messenger in Richmond. He gained a reputation as a cutthroat critic when he wrote vicious reviews of other writers. Poe also published some of his own works in the magazine, including parts of his only novel, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym." Poe's tough style and personality caused trouble at the magazine, however, and he left in 1837. Some reports say that he also drank too much. Poe went on to work at two other publications, Burton's Gentleman's Magazine and The Broadway Journal.

"Tales Of The Grotesque And Arabesque"

In the late 1830s, Poe published a collection of stories called "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque." It contained several of his most famous tales, including "The Fall of the House of Usher." In 1841, he created the murder mystery when he published "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." He also won a prize in 1843 for "The Gold Bug," a story about secret codes and treasure hunting.

In 1845, Poe published a popular poem called "The Raven," considered a great American work and one of the best of his career. In the poem, Poe explored some of his common themes, such as death and loss. That same year, Poe found himself under attack for his stinging criticisms of another popular poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He claimed that Longfellow was a plagiarist, and that made the public angry.

Continuing work in different forms, Poe wrote several essays. He also produced another thrilling tale, "The Cask of Amontillado," and other poems, such as "The Bells."

His Mysterious Death

When Virginia died in 1847, Poe was overcome with grief. He suffered from poor health, and struggled financially. He left Richmond on September 27, 1849, and headed for Philadelphia. On October 3, Poe was found in Baltimore in great distress and was taken to Washington College Hospital, where he died on October 7. His last words were "Lord, help my poor soul." Poe's cause of death is unclear, and what really happened in his final days is a mystery. Some experts say he died of alcoholism while others suggest different diseases.

After he died, Poe's reputation was badly damaged by writer Rufus Griswold. The writer had been criticized by Poe, and took his revenge by writing that Poe was a mentally deranged drunk. However, while he never had success during his lifetime, Poe eventually became one of America's most famous writers.

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