The Cask of Amontillado

Characters Revealed Through Irony

by Edgar Allan Poe
The Cask of Amontillado

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Synopsis

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With the dramatic first sentence, readers enter the disturbed mind of Montresor, the main character who narrates the story. In recounting the events, Montresor reveals the depth of his depravity in avenging a personal insult. The object of Montresor’s intense hatred and obsession with revenge is Fortunato, a wealthy wine merchant whose transgressions against Montresor are never specifically identified. Fortunato’s arrogance and foolish nature make it possible for Montresor to succeed in carrying out a carefully crafted scheme—to murder Fortunato by burying him alive in the catacombs.

As Montresor relates how he planned and executed his revenge, his descriptions and interpretations of what occurred are infused with irony, the predominant literary technique employed by Poe in the narrative. Dramatic irony is created as readers are drawn into Montresor’s mind to view events from his perspective as well as their own. Also evident in the story are situational and verbal irony. Through the irony that permeates “The Cask of Amontillado,” the characters of Montresor and Fortunato are revealed indirectly and the horror of Montresor’s revenge is intensified. Poe’s use of irony also underscores the mood of the story in its examination of human nature and the darkness to be found in the human psyche.

**Characters Revealed Through Irony**

This lesson plan focuses on Poe’s use of irony in developing the main characters in the story, Montresor and Fortunato. Students will identify different types of irony throughout the narrative, examine how they relate to character development, and analyze what they reveal about Montresor and Fortunato. In studying the irony in “The Cask of Amontillado,” students will be better able to describe Montresor and Fortunato’s relationship and to explain what drives their behavior in the story.
Lesson Plan Overview / Characters Revealed Through Irony

Skills
Close reading / Identifying and interpreting irony / Drawing inferences from the text

Assumed Knowledge
- Students can use a computer to access information and navigate a web site.
- Students have experience with taking notes and annotating texts.
- Students know the register and genre of the lecture style and have participated in cooperative learning activities.
- Students have read “The Cask of Amontillado”, know the setting, characters, and plot development. They also should be familiar with the story’s structure and point of view.
- For suggestions in regard to establishing these elements in the story, please refer to the Previous Lesson that follows.

Learning Objectives
By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe examples of verbal irony, situational irony, and dramatic irony in the text.
- Analyze and explain how Montresor’s and Fortunato’s character traits are revealed through irony.
- Describe the relationship between Montresor and Fortunato.

Resources & Materials
- Owl Eyes Classroom
- “The Cask of Amontillado” from Owl Eyes Library
- Handouts:
  - “Three Types of Irony”
  - “Identifying Irony in the Story”
  - “What Is Revealed About Montresor and Fortunato?”
- Computers or tablets
- Paper and pencil

Class Profile
This lesson is appropriate for high school students of different racial/ethnic heritages, cultural experiences, and reading skills who are studying English literature in grades nine and ten. Some elements in the lesson are consistent with the content found in Advanced Placement Literature classes and dual credit courses in literature.

Common Core Standards
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1
  Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4
  Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5
  Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.
The following suggestions represent story elements that should be addressed prior to teaching the main content of this lesson plan. After students have read “The Cask of Amontillado,” discuss with them the setting and the general identity of the characters.

- Point out that the details in the text (wine, palazzos, the carnival season, and the catacombs under Montresor’s palazzo) suggest that the story takes place in Italy during the Italian Renaissance.

- Establish that the story features two main characters, Montresor and Fortunato, who are wine merchants, and makes occasional references to Luchesi, an acquaintance who is a wine connoisseur.

- Discuss with students how Montresor feels about Fortunato and why he feels that way. Establish that Montresor is envious and resentful regarding Fortunato and has developed an obsessive hatred of him. Review with students the reasons for Montresor’s envy, resentment, and hatred:
  - Fortunato is very wealthy, while Montresor is not; Montresor lacks the financial resources to make substantial investments in the wine trade and thus reap greater profits.
  - Fortunato belongs to the upper class in Italian society; Montresor’s family heritage has consigned him to a lower social class.
  - Fortunato is vain and arrogant; he has often treated Montresor with contempt.

Direct students’ attention to the first paragraph in the story, and ask them to identify why Montresor is now determined to punish Fortunato and exact revenge. (Fortunato has inflicted a “thousand injuries” on Montresor and has now insulted him in some way that Montresor can’t ignore.) Ask students to explain Montresor’s views regarding revenge. In the discussion, establish what must occur in exacting revenge, according to Montresor:

- The avenger must never be punished for his actions.
- The object of his revenge must know who is punishing him.

Direct students’ attention to the voice they hear in the first paragraph—Montresor’s voice. Explain that hearing Montresor’s voice at the beginning of the story immediately establishes a first-person point of view, demonstrating that all the events in the story are narrated by Montresor as he remembers and interprets them.

Direct students’ attention to the final paragraph in the story. Establish that Montresor has been relating events that occurred fifty years earlier. Review the sequence of events in the plot, emphasizing how Montresor tricks Fortunato into going into the crypt and how he exacts his revenge. Ask students to recall Montresor’s requirements for revenge at the beginning of the story and explain how he meets them in taking revenge on Fortunato. Establish in the discussion that Fortunato knew that Montresor was murdering him and that Montresor had not been punished for his crime since Fortunato’s remains had never been discovered.

In concluding the lesson, give this homework assignment for students on Owl Eyes:

- Highlight Montresor’s name and Fortunato’s name somewhere in the text, and write an annotation for each character describing your impression of him.
- Set your annotation’s visibility settings to “myself and my teacher,” and make sure to select the correct classroom for your annotation.
- Write one or two paragraphs for each annotation.
## Main Lesson

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<tr>
<th>Time / Interaction</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Aims</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 min.</strong></td>
<td><strong>T-CL</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary Aim</strong>&lt;br&gt;Give students access to the specific text used in the lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5 min.</strong></td>
<td><strong>T-CL</strong></td>
<td><strong>Secondary Aims</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Signal that class has now begun.&lt;br&gt;• Focus students’ attention on the work at hand.&lt;br&gt;• Ensure that everyone has access to Owl Eyes and the Owl Eyes classroom.</td>
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### Introduction

Have students log on to Owl Eyes at www.owleyes.org and open “The Cask of Amontillado.” Tell them to locate the beginning of the text.

- Prior to having students open the text, use your Owl Eyes’ Syllabus-Settings feature to hide the official annotations that have been made to the text.
- If students have studied the story in the Previous Lesson and have completed the homework assignment, keep the filter settings so that only student annotations are visible.

### Warm Up

Ask students to share with the class their impressions of Montresor and Fortunato. If they completed the homework assignment, have them refer briefly to their annotations in the discussion.

Briefly review Montresor’s feelings about Fortunato. Ask students to describe them, establishing these points in the discussion:

- Montresor is envious and resentful of Fortunato’s wealth and position in society.
- He hates Fortunato for routinely treating him with contempt.
- He vows to get revenge after Fortunato insults him.

Point out that how Montresor takes revenge is central to the plot of the story but that how Montresor and Fortunato are developed as characters is just as important in the narrative. Explain that one way Poe develops their characters is by creating irony in the story.
# Main Lesson

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<td><strong>Pre-Main Event</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary Aim</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>T-CL</td>
<td></td>
<td>Define irony and determine students' understanding of the three types of irony.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>30 min.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main Event</strong></td>
<td><strong>Secondary Aims</strong></td>
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<td>T-CL</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Have students apply knowledge gained through instruction to their personal experience.</td>
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<td>• Achieve a specific goal through a cooperative learning activity.</td>
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## Pre-Main Event

Write “Irony” on the board. Explain that irony is created when there is a difference between appearance and reality—what appears to be true differs from what is actually true. Explain further that there are three types of irony: dramatic irony, verbal irony, and situational irony.

Write “Dramatic Irony,” “Verbal Irony,” and “Situational Irony” on the board. Hand out copies of “Three Types of Irony.” Review the definitions and discuss the examples with the class.

Ask students to work with a partner and share examples of irony they recall from something they have read or from a book, movie, or TV show they are familiar with.

After students have had a few minutes to work with their partners, have them share their examples in a class discussion and identify the types of irony their examples illustrate. During the discussion, make sure that students have a clear understanding of each type of irony.

## Main Event

Maintain or enable the strict filter settings for annotation visibility before continuing with the lesson.

**Part I**

Tell students that together you will now examine the text to identify and explain examples of irony in the story.

Before students begin working with their partners, model the next activity by doing a sample annotation over some portion of the text with students as a class contributing ideas for the annotation.

• For example, highlight “Fortunato” in the first line, and ask the class what kind of irony Fortunato’s name illustrates and how his name is ironic. Get feedback and create an annotation that summarizes what the students and you decide. Guide students in recognizing that Fortunato’s name is an example of verbal irony, as he is actually very unfortunate, considering his fate in the story.
## Main Lesson

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<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Aim</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify and describe examples of dramatic irony, verbal irony, and situational irony in the text and determine what is revealed about the characters through irony.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary Aims</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Establish the purpose and direction of the lesson.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Practice close-reading skills.</td>
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<td>S-S-S</td>
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### Part I

Have students work on Owl Eyes with a partner to complete the following class activity, with half of the partner groups focusing on Montresor and the others focusing on Fortunato.

- Highlight passages in the story that illustrate irony.
- Write an annotation for each passage that identifies the type of irony illustrated in the passage (dramatic, verbal, or situational) and explains why the passage is ironic.

Hand out copies of “Identifying Irony in the Story,” and advise students to use the guide in completing the activity. While students complete the activity, monitor their progress and provide assistance as needed.

### Part II

After students have had time to write several annotations, use the site filter to set visibility so that they can read all the annotations written during the activity. Referring to students’ annotations in class discussion, identify, discuss, and clarify examples of each type of irony found in the text.

*(Transition)*

Tell students that together you will now examine what the irony throughout the story reveals about the characters.

Have sets of partners assemble in groups of four. Organize the groups so that students who focused on Montresor work together and those who focused on Fortunato work together.

### Part III

Distribute the handout, “What Is Revealed About Montresor and Fortunato?” Have students collaborate in their groups and prepare to share their findings with the class. Each group should select a “scribe” to take paper/pencil notes over the group’s discussion and a “reporter” to use the notes in presenting the group’s findings to the class.
Main Lesson

After students have conferred, ask the reporters to take turns summarizing for the class what is revealed about the characters through the irony in the story. Discuss the groups' assessments of Montresor and Fortunato, establishing these points about their characters that are revealed through the various types of irony:

**Dramatic Irony**
- Montresor is clever, devious, and possibly insane.
- Fortunato is foolish, arrogant, and susceptible to flattery.
- Montresor is an excellent judge of character; Fortunato is not.

**Verbal Irony**
- Montresor enjoys cleverly manipulating Fortunato in exacting revenge.
- Montresor takes pleasure in demonstrating how superior he is to the wealthy, admired Fortunato.
- Fortunato's name ironically emphasizes that he is ultimately very unfortunate.

**Situational Irony**
- After obsessing about taking revenge on Fortunato and putting much thought and effort in achieving it, Montresor does not feel triumphant when he succeeds in entombing Fortunato; feeling sick at heart, he hurries to finish the wall and leave the crypt.
- Exacting revenge doesn't free Montresor from his obsession with Fortunato; he is still thinking about Fortunato fifty years after murdering him.
- Fortunato has the power afforded by wealth and exalted social position, but he is destroyed by the "inferior" Montresor whom he had viewed with such contempt.

As these and other significant points are established in the discussion, write them on the board or display them on screen.
**Main Lesson**

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<tr>
<td>S-S</td>
<td><strong>Post-Main Event</strong></td>
<td>Have students return to their seats. Using the site filter, mask the annotations on the page, displaying only the official annotations related to irony. Ask students to review them with a new partner and compare the ideas in the annotations with those presented in the class discussion. Have partners then share their observations with the class in response to this question: How effectively has the class identified and explained Poe’s use of irony in developing the characters of Montresor and Fortunato?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td><strong>Primary Aim</strong></td>
<td>Have students reflect on the content of the story.</td>
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</table>
| T-CL               | **Secondary Aims**     | - Build relationships and respect for others’ opinions by having students share personal responses to the story.  
- Provide an opportunity for students to express themselves in an informal class activity. |
| S-S                |                        | When students have written their personal responses, have them share their annotations with a partner and discuss one another’s responses to the story. |

**Literary Devices**

_The Cask of Amontillado_ / Edgar Allan Poe
# Main Lesson

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| **5 min.** T-CL    | **Conclusion / Homework** | **Primary Aim**
|                    | Direct students to close the Owl Eyes site and log off their computers. Assign homework for the following class period. | Signal that the lesson is over and refocus students’ attention. |
|                    | **Suggested Homework** | **Secondary Aims**
|                    | Have students work independently in Owl Eyes to complete this activity and turn in their work on line: | • Provide an opportunity for students to ask individual questions before leaving class. |
|                    | • Highlight a passage in the text that creates horror in the story. | • Prepare the room for the following class period. |
|                    | • Write an annotation explaining why the passage would horrify the reader. |
The following suggestions represent content that should be addressed after teaching the main lesson. Draw students’ attention to Edgar Allan Poe as a celebrated writer whose short stories are among the most famous and frequently read stories in American literature. Ask students what else they know about Poe, and share the following facts:

Besides being a writer, Poe was also a literary critic, the first to define the short story as a unique literary genre.

- He formulated a theory regarding the content and characteristics of a short story.
- He contended that a short story should evoke a strong emotional response in the reader.
- He said that a short story “must have a single mood and every sentence must build towards it.”

Point out that in many of Poe’s short stories, as in “The Cask of Amontillado,” he strives to evoke feelings of horror.

Write “horror story” on the board. Ask students how they define horror, and establish that it is “a feeling of fear, dread, shock, and revulsion.” Ask students to explain how the setting in “The Cask of Amontillado” contributes to the horror in the story. Guide the discussion to establish these text details:

- Most of the story takes place in a crypt filled with human remains and bones stacked in heaps and scattered throughout.
- The crypt is silent, damp, dark; illuminated only by flickering torch as Montresor and Fortunato move through the rooms.
- The walls and ceiling are covered with webs of nitre that glow in the torchlight.

Ask students to explain why Montresor’s actions are horrifying. Establish these text details in the discussion:

- Montresor is cold and calculating in carefully planning every detail of his scheme to murder Fortunato.
- Preying on Fortunato’s weaknesses, Montresor leads him to his death, literally one step at a time.
- He murders Fortunato in a way that will inflict prolonged physical suffering and psychological anguish.

Ask students to describe how Poe intensifies the horror in the final scene between Montresor and Fortunato. Discuss these details from the scene:

- Intoxicated and confused, Fortunato is chained to the wall before he realizes what is happening to him.
- As he becomes sober, Fortunato slowly understands Montresor’s intentions in building the wall; Montresor builds the wall methodically, laying stone upon stone.
- Terrified, Fortunato tries violently to free himself; Montresor takes pleasure listening to his chains rattling in trying to escape.
- Fortunato tries desperately in several ways to persuade Montresor to release him; Montresor mocks him each time.
- Fortunato cries out, “For the love of God, Montresor!”, and then grows quiet, suggesting he has accepted his fate.
- Montresor goes away, leaving Fortunato entombed in darkness with no hope of being rescued.

Ask students to describe the mood in the story and to explain how the many elements of horror contribute to it. Students often describe the mood as dark, mysterious, suspenseful, and spooky, concluding that the setting and Montresor’s actions are of primary importance in creating it.

(Lesson continued on next page)
Finish the lesson by assigning the following homework. Students can either create annotations on Owl Eyes or bring hard copies of their responses to class.

- Review the approved annotations on Owl Eyes for “The Cask of Amontillado.”
- Choose three, and write a personal response for each one.
- Each response should be one or two paragraphs. (Your responses may be written on paper or submitted in an email.)
- In writing your responses, consider these questions:
  - Do you agree or disagree with the content of the annotation? Why do you think the content is valid or invalid?
  - Do you question how someone has interpreted the characters or the story? Why do you think the interpretation may not be sound? What is your interpretation?
  - Does the annotation make you wonder about some aspects of the story? What does it make you think about? What questions about the story does it make you want to ask?
- Write a final paragraph describing your overall impression of the annotations to the text of the story.
The handouts on the following pages have been specifically designed for easy printing. Handouts for this lesson plan include:

- Three Types of Irony
- Identifying Irony in the Story
- What Is Revealed About Montresor and Fortunato?
I. Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony is created in literature (in stories, novels, and plays) when readers know more than a character knows about a particular situation. What a character believes to be true isn’t true, and readers recognize the difference. Here are some examples from William Shakespeare’s play, Julius Caesar:

1. Brutus finds a letter begging him to free Rome from Julius Caesar’s tyranny. He believes the letter is genuine and was written by a desperate Roman citizen who doesn’t want to live under a dictator. Readers (and the audience watching a performance of the play) know that the letter is fake and that it was written by Cassius to draw Brutus into the conspiracy to kill Caesar.

2. Several Roman senators come to Caesar’s house to escort him to the Senate. Caesar believes they are his good friends. Readers and the audience know that they are conspiring to murder Caesar and plan to kill him at the Capitol.

3. Artemidorus tries to give Caesar a letter on the way to the Capitol. Caesar refuses to take it and dismisses Artemidorus. Readers and the audience know that the letter warns Caesar of the conspiracy against him and names the senators who intend to kill him.

II. Verbal Irony

Verbal irony exists when words don’t mean what they seem to mean; the truth of the message is different from what it appears to be. Here are some general examples:

1. I forgot my lunch money, and I have three tests this afternoon. It’s definitely going to be a great day.

2. I love watching TV with my little sister. The conflicts on Sesame Street are so dramatic!

3. The neighbors really like my brother’s new motorcycle, especially when he rides it home at 2:00 a.m.

III. Situational Irony

Situational irony is created when the outcome of events differs from what someone would reasonably expect to happen. Situational irony is especially dramatic when the outcome of events is the opposite of what would be expected. Here are some examples from various pieces of literature:

1. In “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” a ship is becalmed at sea. The crew is dying of thirst, even though they are surrounded by water.

2. In Fahrenheit 451, one job of the firemen is to start fires and burn down houses.

3. In Macbeth, Lady Macbeth has no reservations about killing the king and pushes Macbeth to murder him, but it is she who is eventually destroyed by guilt and commits suicide.
Consider these questions in identifying and explaining examples of dramatic, verbal, and situational irony in the story.

In regard to Montresor:

• What do readers recognize about Montresor that he doesn’t understand about himself?

• What are some of the things Montresor says that are the opposite of what he means?

• Is murdering Fortunato ultimately as satisfying as Montresor thought it would be?

• When and why does Montresor confess to the murder?

In regard to Fortunato:

• What do readers recognize about Fortunato that he doesn’t understand about himself?

• What do readers understand that Fortunato doesn’t as he talks to Montresor?

• How is Fortunato dressed? Why is he dressed in this manner on this particular evening? How does his evening end?

• Does Fortunato’s wealth and social position actually make him superior to Montresor?
Recalling the examples of dramatic, verbal, and situational irony in the story, consider how they reveal specific character traits in Montresor and Fortunato. Keep these questions in mind as you analyze their characters. After examining their characters, list several of their character traits that are implied through the irony in the story and be prepared to explain your thinking.

I. Dramatic Irony

- What is revealed about Montresor as readers enter his mind and then watch as he goes about murdering Fortunato?

- What is revealed about Fortunato during his conversations with Montresor?

II. Verbal Irony

- What is revealed about Montresor as he continues to mock Fortunato by saying one thing while meaning another?

- How does Montresor seem to feel while mocking Fortunato? Why?

III. Situational Irony

- Why is the outcome of events surprising, considering Montresor’s and Fortunato’s individual wealth and their positions in society?

- Why is the outcome of events surprising, considering Montresor’s obsession with Fortunato and desire for revenge?

- Why is the conclusion of the story surprising, considering Montresor’s requirements in taking revenge?