



# THE LITERARY ESSAY EXAM

Kelli McBride  
Literature Classes: ENG 2413, ENG 2433, and ENG 2543



# Sample Question

- The narrator in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” claims he is not insane. Do you agree or disagree with his self-assessment? Support your answer by analyzing the narrator’s actions and words, using examples of each in your response.
- **What are the key actions you must take in answering this question?**



# Sample Question - KEY

- The narrator in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" claims he is not insane. Do you **agree** or **disagree** with his self-assessment? Support your answer by **analyzing** the narrator's actions and words, **using** examples of each in your response.
- **What are the key actions you must take in answering this question? Answering, analyzing, and using.**



# Sample Answer – Pt. 1

In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," the mad narrator explains in detail how he whacks the old man, who screams as he dies. The police show up because a neighbor calls them and the madman gives them a tour of the house, ending up in the bedroom, where the man has been buried under the bed. The narrator hears the old man's heart beating loudly, and he is driven to confess the murder.

**□ How does this passage answer the question?**

**Q:** The narrator in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" claims he is not insane. Do you agree or disagree with his self-assessment? Support your answer by analyzing the narrator's actions and words, using examples of each in your response.



# Sample Answer – KEY

- **How does this passage answer the question?**
- **It does not answer the question. Instead, this first part is simply a summary of the short story.**



# Sample Answer – KEY

**□ Why is this a weakness of the answer?**



# Sample Answer – KEY

- **Why is this a weakness of the answer?**
- **The question did not ask for summary, and unless specifically required, summary is usually unnecessary. The writer should assume the reader is familiar with the story.**



# Sample Answer – KEY

In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," the mad narrator explains in detail how he whacks the old man, who screams as he dies.

□ Evaluate this passage for diction and documentation of text.



# Sample Answer – KEY

In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," the **mad** narrator explains in detail how he **whacks** the old man, who screams as he dies.

- "Mad" is ambiguous – is the narrator angry or insane?
- Use of "whacks" is informal.
- No page number at the end to refer to text.



# Sample Answer – Suggested Revision

(though still does not answer question)

**Revised:** In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," the insane narrator explains in detail how he kills the old man, who screams as he dies (245). After being alerted by a neighbor, the police arrive, and the madman gives them a tour of the house, finally halting in the old man's bedroom, where he has buried the man beneath the floor planks under the bed (246-47). As he is talking, the narrator hears what he thinks is the old man's heart beating loudly, and he confesses the murder (247).

**Original:** In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," the mad narrator explains in detail how he whacks the old man, who screams as he dies. The police show up because a neighbor calls them and the madman gives them a tour of the house, ending up in the bedroom, where the man has been buried under the bed. The narrator hears the old man's heart beating loudly, and he is driven to confess the murder.



## Sample Answer – Pt. 2

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth." He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247). Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247). Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is nuttier than a fruit cake.



# Sample Answer – KEY

□ **How does this passage answer the question:**

□ **Q:** The narrator in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” claims he is not insane. Do you agree or disagree with his self-assessment? Support your answer by analyzing the narrator’s actions and words, using examples of each in your response.



# Sample Answer – KEY

**It answers the question of sanity.**

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and **lies about his sanity**. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth." He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247).

**Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting.** Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247). Dead hearts do not beat, **nor do sane people** confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" **is nuttier than a fruit cake.**



## Sample Answer – KEY

**It provides examples of the narrator's words and actions to support that action.**

Though the narrator **claims he is not mad**, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "**all things in the heaven and in the earth.**" He also **tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247).** Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then **confess without prompting.** Finally, the madman is so **plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247).** Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their consciousness with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is nuttier than a fruit cake.



# Sample Answer – KEY

**It provides rationale to show how the narrator's words and actions are at odds with common sense or sanity.**

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, **the reader realizes that he unreliable and lies about his sanity.** For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth." He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247). **Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting.** Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247). **Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects.** All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is nuttier than a fruit cake.



# Sample Answer – KEY

- **Evaluate this passage for diction and documentation of text.**



## Sample Answer – KEY

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth."



## Sample Answer – KEY

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth." ??

□ No page number – Technical Plagiarism



## Sample Answer – KEY

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth."

- No page number – Technical Plagiarism
- Good integration of quotation with writer's text.



## Sample Answer – KEY

He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (Poe 247).



## Sample Answer – KEY

He also tells a **completely untrue lie** to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (Poe 247).

□ “**Completely untrue lie**” is redundant and wordy.



## Sample Answer – KEY

He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the **shreak** they hear occurs in his dream (Poe 247).

- “Completely untrue lie” is redundant and wordy.
- Shreak is misspelled.



## Sample Answer – KEY

He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shreak they hear occurs in his dream (Poe 247).

- “Completely untrue lie” is redundant and wordy.
- Shreak is misspelled.
- MLA is correct.



## Sample Answer – KEY

Though sane people lie, most **don't** meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (Poe 247).

□ **It is better to spell out contractions in a short answer: don't = do not**



## Sample Answer – KEY

Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so **plagued** with guilt that he hears his own **conscience** in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (Poe 247).

□ **Plagued and conscience are misspelled**



## Sample Answer – KEY

Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (Poe 247).

□ **Correct parenthetical notation**



## Sample Answer – KEY

Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is nuttier than a fruit cake.

□ Evaluate this passage for diction and documentation of text.



## Sample Answer – KEY

Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their **conscious's** with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is nuttier than a fruit cake.

□ **Consciencences is misspelled**



## Sample Answer – KEY

Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is **nuttier than a fruit cake.**

□ Phrase "nuttier than a fruit cake" is too informal for a college-level essay exam.



## Sample Answer – KEY

Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in **Poe's short story**, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is nuttier than a fruit cake.

□ Good use of signal-in at the end of the answer to wrap it up.



# Sample Answer – Suggested Revision

**Revised:** Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart," takes readers into the mind of the narrator as he plans then executes the murder of his employer. Though the narrator claims he is not insane, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth". Sane people cannot. He also lies to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (Poe 247). Though sane people do lie, most do not meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscience in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247). Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their consciences with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is insane.

**Original:** Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart," takes readers into the mind of the narrator as he plans then executes the murder of his employer. Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth". Sane people cannot. He also lies to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (Poe 247). Though sane people do lie, most do not meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscience in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247). Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their consciences with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is insane.



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Evaluate the accuracy and completeness of this work cited entry.



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Title of page correct



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Author name is correct.



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Title of story is correctly formatted.



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing:



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing: title



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” ?? p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing: title, editors



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” ?? p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing: title, editors, place of publication



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” ?? p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing: title, editors, place of publication, publishers



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” ?? p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing: title, editors, publishers, place of publication, and date.



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Page numbers are correct, but formatting is not.



# Sample Answer – Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- The type of source is missing at the end of the citation.



# Sample Answer – Corrected Work Cited

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” *Anthology of American Short Stories*. Ed. Allison Smith and Dave Weston. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Macmillan, 2007. 245-47. Print.

## Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.



# Work Cited for class materials

## Works Cited

*Gilgamesh*. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. Ed. Sarah Lawall and Maynard Mack. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Norton, 2002. 12-41. Print.

Homer. *The Iliad*. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. Ed. Sarah Lawall and Maynard Mack. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Norton, 2002. 120-225. Print.

McBride, Kelli. "The Epic Hero and His Journey." *ENG/HUM 2433 World Literature I*. Seminole State College, Seminole, OK. 2010. Course Handout.

# Signal **IN** and Signal **OUT** for Works

## Cited entries:

- **Gilgamesh** explores, in part, the conflict between civilization and nature. One example of this conflict occurs in the quest to defeat Humbaba. Gilgamesh, representing civilization, wants to be merciful to the monster. However, Enkidu, representing nature, urges Gilgamesh to kill him (**23**).
- **Homer** does not glamorize war in *The Iliad*. Instead, he shows both the glory and bitterness of battle. For example, after Achilles learns of Patroclus' death, he wishes strife could “die from the lives of god and men” (**Homer 179**). Here he clearly regrets the nature of war. However, in the same scene, he says about his impending fight with Hector, “let me seize great glory” (**180**).
- Part of **Joseph Campbell's hero's journey** is the “call to adventure” where the hero gets the invitation to join the quest (**McBride 1**).



# Questions/Discussions

- Where do you feel confident in your ability to write a short answer essay?
  - Discussion
- Where do you still feel weak?
  - Discussion
- Other questions?
  - Discussion