**Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts on January 19, 1809. His parents were both actors. His mother was a beautiful and famous actress named Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins Poe. His father was an alcoholic and a less successful actor named David Poe, Jr. They were married when Elizabeth was 19 years old.**

**Edgar had an older brother named Henry and a younger sister named Rosalie. He was the middle child.**

**Poe’s father abandoned the family in July 1811 and continued to drink heavily. He left the family with no money and no means of support. Edgar’s mother was already very sick with a disease called tuberculosis. She could no longer take care of the children because of her health. The children stayed with friends until Elizabeth died from tuberculosis on December 8, 1811 with her children at her bedside. She was only 23 years old. Henry was 4, Edgar was 3 and Rosalie was barely over a year old. Three days after Elizabeth died, David Poe was found dead from alcoholism on December 11, 1811. The three children were now orphans.**

**With no one willing to take the three small children together, the children had to be split up. Poe was taken into the home of a family friend, John Allan. He was a successful tobacco merchant in Richmond, Virginia. Rosalie also went to Richmond to live with a wealthy family named Mackenzie. Henry, however, went to live with his grandparents (father’s parents) in Baltimore, Maryland. Although Edgar was able to see his sister every few months, they were not very close. Rosalie was very slow and simple. Now, experts think that Rosalie may have been mentally retarded and she lived with the Mackenzie family until she died, never marrying or having children.**

**Edgar was able to communicate with Henry through writing letters, but they rarely saw each other. Although they met only a few times in person, the brothers were very close. Edgar modeled many of the characters in his poems and stories on his brother, Henry. Unfortunately, Henry was a heavy drinker, just like their father, and became ill. He died from tuberculosis, the same disease that killed their mother, at the age of 27.**

When Poe was 6, the Allan family sent him to a boarding school in England for 5 years (kind of like Hogwarts in Harry Potter!). He learned Latin and French, as well as math and history. He was a very good student and a terrific writer. Edgar was very shy and quiet and only had a few good friends. He was very good at sports, but he was sometimes bullied.

Poe came back to America at age 12 and continued his studies at a private boys’ school. He was one of the top students, especially in literature and writing. Edgar then went to the University of Virginia in 1826. He was 17 years old and he wanted to be a writer. His foster father didn’t agree. He wanted Edgar to study business and come work with him at his tobacco company. Edgar was stubborn and refused to change his plans. Edgar’s foster mother, Francis Allan, convinced her husband to let Edgar pursue his writing career, but this drove a wedge between Edgar and John that was never resolved. To punish Edgar for his decision, John Allan, who had plenty of money, only gave Edgar enough for his college expenses and a very small allowance.

Edgar got very angry at his foster father because he thought he was being cheap. Edgar also became very depressed when he found out that his foster mother, Frances Allan, who he loved dearly, died from the same disease that killed his mother, tuberculosis.

Feeling alone and angry, Edgar started to drink and gamble in an attempt to get more money. He lost more games than he won and he got into an enormous amount of debt. John Allan refused to pay Edgar’s gambling debts or his college tuition. With only a few dollars to his name, Edgar was forced to quit school less than a year later.

In debt and with no way to support himself, Edgar decided to join the army in 1827 to try to pay his bills. He was 18 years old. After working his way up to a sergeant major, Poe decided to go to the United States Army College, West Point Academy, to become an officer in the army and earn more pay. Since he was well educated and came from a good family, he was immediately accepted as a cadet at the school. During his school breaks, Edgar stayed with his aunt, Maria Clemm, and her daughter, Virginia at their house in Baltimore.

Edgar thought that John Allan would forgive him and start giving him money again for his many bills. Edgar was wrong. After writing his adopted father many letters that went unanswered, Edgar got very angry. He decided to purposely break the strict rules of West Point Academy. He missed morning drill practice. He skipped classes. He was rude to his superiors. All the while, he continued to ask John Allan for money. His requests continued to be ignored. Edgar ramped up his defiant behavior in an attempt to deliberately embarrass his adopted father, John Allan. There was a rumor that Edgar showed up one day to drill practice naked, but we don’t have any proof that this actually happened. Regardless, Edgar was court marshaled for his behavior and dishonorably discharged (kicked out) of the army in 1831.

Edgar borrowed some money from his aunt and decided to see if he could get a job as a writer. He moved to New York City in the summer of 1831 and looked for work at different newspapers and publishing houses. No luck. He submitted some stories he had written to a number of magazines and they were all rejected. Poe had no friends, no job, and was in financial trouble. He sent another letter to John Allan, this time begging for help, but none came. When John Allan died in 1834, Edgar found out that he wasn’t even mentioned in the will. Poe felt abandoned once again.

In 1835, Poe’s luck finally started to turn around. Edgar finally got a job as an editor of a newspaper in Richmond, Virginia because of a contest he won with his story, "[The Manuscript Found in a Bottle](http://www.poestories.com/text.php?file=manuscript)". Poe also had a book of his poems accepted and published called “Tamerlane and Other Poems”. He finally started to make a little money and find some success in his writing career.

Edgar missed his aunt Mrs. Clemm and her daughter, Virginia, and at his aunt’s request, he decided to live with them and help with expenses. Spending almost all his free time with Virginia, Poe fell madly in love with his cousin. She was very pretty and loved to play the piano and sing. Her bright personality seemed to balance out Poe’s sad and depressed thoughts. Poe thought he had found his soul-mate.

In 1836, Edgar married his cousin, Virginia. He was 27 and she was 13.

Poe continued to work for many different magazines and sold more of his short stories, but he didn’t make enough money to support his expensive lifestyle. He continued to be in debt. In 1843, he won a hundred dollars for his mystery story, "[The Gold Bug](http://www.poestories.com/text.php?file=goldbug)". It sold very well and was the most widely read of any of Poe’s stories at the time. Still, Poe’s spending was out of control and he barely had enough money to support his family. Often, his aunt, Mrs. Clemm had to give him and Virginia money to live on.

Perhaps ashamed of having to depend on his aunt, Poe decided to move back to New York City. In 1845, Edgar became an editor at a literary magazine called *The Broadway Journal*. Poe was a very harsh critic of other peoples’ writing and made enemies of many authors. A year later, the magazine ran out of money and Poe was unemployed yet again.

His luck was about to get even worse. Edgar and Virginia moved to a small cottage that they shared with Virginia’s mother in the Bronx. One night, Virginia was playing the piano and singing for her mother and Edgar. She stopped to cough and a drop of blood appeared on her lips. Poe knew that Virginia had the same disease that had killed his mother, foster mother and brother, Henry; consumption or tuberculosis. Virginia's health began to fade away as she slowly became weaker and weaker. Edgar sank into a deep depression as he constantly thought of her coming death. At this time he was also drinking very heavily and using a drug called opium which greatly affected his health.

During this time, Edgar wrote his famous poem, “The Raven” to try to deal with Virginia’s oncoming death. Poe only earned $14 for the poem, but it was an instant success and published nationwide in newspapers. Poe went on a national tour, reading “The Raven” and some of his other poems to large audiences. In the midst of all of this success, Virginia finally died from tuberculosis 10 days after Edgar's birthday in January of 1847. She was 23 years old, the same age as Poe’s mother when she died and from the same disease.

Poe felt that his world had been turned upside down.

Poe relied on some close friends to help him through Virginia’s death, but his grief consumed him. His drinking got out of control and Poe even tried to commit suicide by taking a large dose of opium. His friends were able to get him to the doctor in time to save his life, but Poe realized things had to change.

In June of 1849, Poe left New York and went back to Richmond, Virginia, his boyhood home. He stayed at the Swan Tavern Hotel and joined "The Sons of Temperance" in an effort to stop drinking. He also renewed a boyhood romance with Sarah Royster Shelton who he had wanted to marry when he was 17. The two spent a lot of time together and Poe planned to marry Sarah later in October of that year. It was never to happen.

On September 27, Poe left Richmond for New York, again trying to find a stable job. He stopped in Philadelphia on the way and stayed with a good friend named James Moss. On September 30, Moss took Poe to the train station, assuming Poe was back on the way to New York City. For reasons no one knows, Poe took the train instead to Baltimore.

Tragedy occurred. On October 3, Poe was found lying in the street in Baltimore, bloody and beaten and wearing clothes that were not his own. He was barely conscious and was taken to a hospital for help. After lingering for three days in delirium, in the early morning hours of October 7th, Poe woke briefly to breathe his last words, “Lord, help my poor soul.” His official cause of death was “congestion of the brain”, but no autopsy was done to determine if Poe died from a head injury or there was another cause of death.

The mystery surrounding Poe's death has led to many myths and urban legends. The reality is that no one knows for sure what happened during the last few days of his life. There are many theories on how Poe died. Here are some of them:

1. **Alcoholism**- Poe drank a lot during his lifetime. Poe could have died from liver failure from his drinking or from many other diseases related to alcohol abuse.
2. **Diabetes**- Some doctors think Poe had diabetes from his poor diet and alcoholism. He may have been in a diabetic coma.
3. **Mugged or beaten**- Poe was not wearing his own clothes when he was found and his face was all bloody. He may have been robbed.
4. **Rabies**- Some people think Poe may have been bitten by rats or other animals while lying in the street. Also, Poe owned a cat, which may have scratched or bitten him and given him rabies. It was very common at the time.
5. **Meningitis**- Poe may have caught meningitis which leads to brain swelling and a high fever. You can die if left untreated.

Poe's funeral was a simple one, held at 4 p.m. on Monday, October 8, 1849 in Baltimore, Maryland. Very few people attended the ceremony. Poe's uncle, Henry Herring, provided a simple mahogany coffin, and a cousin, Neilson Poe, supplied the hearse. The wife of a friend made his shroud.

The entire ceremony lasted only three minutes in the cold, damp weather. Reverend Clemm decided not to bother with a sermon because the crowd was too small. George W. Spence wrote of the weather: "It was a dark and gloomy day, not raining but just kind of raw and threatening." Poe was buried in a cheap coffin that lacked handles, a nameplate, cloth lining, or a cushion for his head.

In 1875, Poe was reburied in Westminster Cemetery in Baltimore after his writing was “rediscovered” and he became famous. The bodies of his wife and mother-in-law were also buried with him.

Starting in 1949, a man known as the Poe Toaster visited the grave of Edgar Allan Poe every January 19th, which is the date of Edgar’s birthday. He was dressed all in black with a cape and a silver headed cane. He left 3 red roses on Poe’s grave, believed to be for Poe, Virginia, and Poe’s mother-in-law who are all buried there. He also left a bottle of cognac (expensive alcohol) for Poe to enjoy. Despite attempts to find out this man’s identity, no one was ever able to track down or catch the Poe Toaster in the act. Perhaps now the mystery will never be solved. After visiting Poe’s grave for 60 years, the Poe Toaster failed to show up in 2009 or 2010, leading people to believe that the Poe Toaster may have joined Poe in the afterlife. In 2010, after waiting until 5:45 in the morning, fans of the Poe Toaster quietly left their own roses on Poe’s grave and went home. We will just have to wait and see if he shows up this year, or if the tradition has finally come to an end.

[](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/6/67/Pepper's.jpg)

Poe is everywhere still in our culture. In 1967, the Beatles released their album, Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club band, featuring many famous people on the cover. One of these people was Edgar Allan Poe. Can you find him on the album cover?

Poe in Modern Culture

Heavy metal band Iron Maiden included the song "Murders in the Rue Morgue" — the title of one of Poe's best-known stories — on their 1981 album "Killers."

At least 81 films have been based on works by Edgar Allen Poe

There have been several cartoons featured on The Simpsons about Edgar Allan Poe’s stories. Two of these episodes were titled “The Tell-Tale Head” and “The Raven”.

In December, 1999, the web search engine Lycos announced the "Millennium's Most Wanted." It was a list of the most popular searches for historical figures that people completed on Lycos that year. Edgar Allan Poe was #4 on the list, immediately following Adolph Hitler and just before Joan of Arc. (Shakespeare was #1 on the list).

Also, in 1999 The Hollywood Reporter reported that singer Michael Jackson was supposed to star as Poe in a feature film to be called "The Nightmare of Edgar Allan Poe." Obviously, that film project never happened, but it seems even the King of Pop wanted to pay tribute to Poe.

In 1945, the Mystery Writers of America, Inc. established an award to recognize outstanding contributions to various categories of mystery, crime and suspense writing. These awards are known as The Edgar Allan Poe Awards. The statuette that winners receive is called an Edgar.

In November of 2003, Edgar Allan Poe: The Musical began playing in London, England. The play is now performed in several languages and is still running on Broadway and cities throughout the world.

Nintendo loved to use Poe in their video games. Poe appeared in The Legend of Zelda and Nintendo even released a game in 2010 for Nintendo DS called Midnight Mysteries: The Edgar Allan Poe Conspiracy.

If you like football, you’ll be surprised to find out that Poe has even invaded the NFL. Did you know that the Baltimore Ravens are named for Poe’s famous poem, “The Raven”? Since Poe died in Baltimore, the city likes to claim him for its’ own. Their official team mascot is a huge black raven named “Poe” in his honor.

What will Poe appear in next? We will just have to wait and see…………..