**Study Guide for Poe’s “The Black Cat”**

“The Black Cat” is one of Edgar Allan Poe’s most memorable works of horror. The story depicts an alcoholic’s deterioration, but it also features episodes of animal abuse and murder.

**Setting**

Where does the story take place? (List different settings). Why is time significant?

How essential is the setting to the story? Could the story have taken place anywhere else?

**Character**

Who are the characters in the story?

How does Poe reveal the narrator’s character in the black cat?

Examples of *direct characterization* of narrator:

Examples of *indirect characterization*:

Is the narrator consistent in his actions? Is he a fully developed character? How? Why?

**Conflict**

What are the conflicts in the story? What *types of conflict* (physical, moral, intellectual, emotional) do you see?

**Point of view**

From what point of view is the story told? How does this affect our interpretation of events?

**Symbolism**

*Allusion: A reference to something or someone in history, literature, art, popular culture, etc*.

Explain the allusion and symbolism of Pluto, the black cat.

**Foreshadowing**

Give 2 important quotes and explain how they foreshadow future events in the story.

**Themes**

*Consider and explain how we see the following thematic topics in the story.*

Dark/evil side of human nature

Vengeance/Revenge

Reality vs. perceived reality (can be tied to drug abuse, mental illness)

**Language**

*Anaphora is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is repeated at the beginning of a clause or another group of words. Anaphora imparts emphasis and balance*. Here are boldfaced examples from "The Black Cat":

**I** blush, **I** burn, **I** shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity

**I** experienced a sentiment **half of** horror, **half of** remorse. . . .

It was this unfathomable longing of the soul **to vex** itself–**to offer** violence to its own nature–**to do** wrong for the wrong's sake only –that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute.

**What is the effect of the anaphora in this quote?**

*Syntax is the arrangement of words in a sentence; the arrangement of sentences in a paragraph; the arrangement of paragraphs in a work. Syntax also refers to the structure of sentences, be they simple or complex, long or short, etc.*

**Discuss the syntax and punctuation in the following quote:**

“No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb!---by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman-a howl-a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation!”

**Gothic Elements:**

Explain how “The Black Cat” fits the Gothic elements discussed in class. Give at least 4 specific examples.

**Study Questions:**

What is the role of women in the story?

Why did the narrator initially restrain himself from maltreating the cat while maltreating the other animals?

Describe the narrator’s feelings after abusing the cat. Why is that significant?

What is significant about the new cat and his markings? What does the cat symbolize?

Why is the narrator able to sleep well after he conceals the body?

Why does the narrator feel triumphant when the police arrive?

**Essay Question**

*Answer in a couple of paragraphs. Use quotes to support your opinion.*

**The narrator in “The Black Cat” is considered unreliable. We can’t trust his account of events because we don’t know if he is telling the truth or actually sane. Do you think the narrator is sane? The definition of legal insanity is the inability to know right from wrong when a crime is committed. Defend whether you think the narrator is sane or insane. Provide support**.