Edgar Allan Poe

**Date of Birth** January 19, 1909

**Place of Birth** Boston, Massachusetts

**Birth Family** David Poe, father, abandoned the family. / Mother Eliza died of tuberculosis. / All three children went into foster care. Edgar Poe was only two years old.

**Childhood Experiences:**  Poe was taken in by the Allan family. Francis adored him, but John did not. Edgar was given a strong education and was raised in Richmond, VA as a gentleman. He was a very athletic young man; in fact, he swam six miles across the Richmond River at the age of fifteen. His first love was his best friend’s mother, who died of brain cancer at an early age.Not long after, Poe learned that his foster mother was suffering with tuberculosis, just as his mother had.

**Education:** Edgar was sent to the University of Virginia, where Poe engaged his fellow students with his art work and his original stories. Nevertheless, Poe did not have the money he needed to stay in school. First, he turned to gambling, but found himself in debt. He said, “The world shall be my theater.” He left school and ran away to join the army. When, John Allan disowned Poe, he headed into the world on his own.

**Careers:** He published his first two books of poetry with his own money. He spent a short period of time in the army, but then ran away. He worked as an editor of the Southern Literary Messenger, but there he wrote such harsh reviews of others that he did not last long in positions as editor or reviewer.

**Adult Family:** Poe moved in with his Aunt Maria Clemm and fell in love with his twelve-year-old cousin, Virginia. He then needed to figure out a way to support his new family, but he struggled in poverty throughout his life.

**How he/she became a writer:** He loved the written word and shared stories with his classmates at the University of Virginia. Shortly after leaving the University, he spent his own money to publish his first two books of poetry. He continued trying to make a living as a writer throughout his life. But this time period was not a time when writers were rewarded well for their creations.

**Why he/she writes what he/she does:** His writings reveal the morbid fears and unspeakable longings of Edgar Allan Poe. He knew intimately the tortures of madness. The themes of his stories are rooted in the grim realities of his life. Besieged by one premature death after another, Poe yearns for a connection with the afterlife in order to be with those he had lost. “The boundaries between life and death are at best shadowy and vague.” (“The Premature Burial”)  
He wants to know where life is headed. His greatest fear is that death is simply an end—oblivion. His writings grappled with the mystery of death. There was almost no catastrophe that did not touch his life. He was caught in a struggle between sanity and insanity. “Why would you say I am mad?” (“The Tell-Tale Heart”) Many of his characters seem to be in that same state. He describes much chaos in his stories. After so many in his life had died from the dreaded disease—tuberculosis--he writes, “No pestilence had ever been so fatal or so hideous. Blood was its…seal…He had come like a thief in the night and one by one dropped the revelers in the blood bedewed halls…and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable Dominion over all.” (“The Masque of the Red Death”) Poe writes “The Raven” to pour out the pain of the death of his wife, Virginia, to the same disease as had killed his mother and his brother. The raven’s word, “Nevermore,” speaks Poe’s lack of hope that he will ever see his own wife and loved ones again.

**Awards:** “The Raven” was his only work to be a sensation while he was still alive. He made only fourteen dollars for this poem.

**Interests / Hobbies:** He played various instruments. Poe was athletic, playing sports and swimming. He loved writing and drawing. His one main interest was women. His other ultimate interest, though, came to be his ruin—alcohol.

**Other Intriguing Information:** He called his first cousin, Virginia, “My love, my own sweetest sissy, my darling little wifey.” He thought of her as his love, his sister, and his wife all at once.

His life was a constant struggle and series of humiliations. He showed up for a meeting with the President of the United States drunk. He seemed to constantly sabotage himself, as if his early experience of being abandoned created a chronic pattern that he continued throughout his life.

He could not survive without the love of a woman. It seemed to be his entire goal in life—to gain a woman.

His life ended in mystery before the age of forty. He was headed to Baltimore to tell Maria Clemm of his engagement to Elmira Shelton when he vanished for several days. On October 3, 1848, He was discovered on a Baltimore street in clothes that were not his own. When taken to the hospital, he could not be saved. Several theories exist: rabies, alcoholism, carbon monoxide poisoning, political kidnapping, brain lesions, and tuberculosis.

Poe leaves the world with the insanity of his writings wrapped in the mystery of his death.