

“The Fall of the House of Usher” Study Guide

1. What is the setting of this story?
2. Using the textual clues from the first few pages of the story, draw a picture of the house. It does not have to be fancy, but make sure you include the specific features given.
3. What is meant by “the entire family lay in direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain”?
4. Look at the picture of Poe in the preface to the story and the narrator’s description of Roderick. Do you see any similarities or differences? Be specific.
5. What is the nature of Roderick’s illness? Of Madeline’s? Describe in detail.
6. Why does Poe make Roderick and Madeline twins and not just brother and sister? What does Madeline seem to represent? What does Roderick seem to represent?
7. Summarize the plot of the narrative poem “The Haunted Palace.”
8. What does Roderick believe is causing his illness?
9. Where does Roderick bury his sister? Why is this location chosen?
10. What could Madeline’s Vault symbolize? How does the place and nature of Madeline’s burial contribute to the meaning of the story?
11. How does Roderick react to Madeline’s death and burial?
12. “The Mad Trist” is a fictitious tale. What is a “trist”? (Hint: It could be spelled differently.) What does “mad” mean besides angry? What happens in “The Mad Trist” that parallels what is happening in the story?
13. What exactly happens to Madeline after her death?
14. Why doesn’t Roderick rescue her after he realizes she is still alive?
15. How does Roderick die?
16. What does the structural problem with the house have to do with the ending of the story? How does it relate to the illness Roderick suffers? Use textual evidence to support your answer.
17. How does the house break apart? Why does the house break apart?
18. Who is the narrator of the story? Why is that significant?
19. What is the theme of the story?