

# The Cask of Amontillado by Edgar Allan Poe

## Suggested Lesson Procedure:

1. **Day 1:** Begin by asking students what they already know about Edgar Allan Poe. After discussing their prior knowledge, you may want to provide a brief background about his sad, troubled life. Tell the class that the setting for today's story, "The Cask of Amontillado," was inspired by the catacombs of Paris. Again, ask for any knowledge the class already has about this topic. Show this YouTube video to help students visualize what the underground chambers in this story look like:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsqCXXyzlUM> (Stop the video at the 2:50 mark; beyond that, the host doesn't do anything important.)

2. Read the public domain story together as a class (see pages 2-5).

3. Give a copy of the questions on page 6 to each student. Sometimes, I have students work independently to answer the questions. Other times, I allow them to work in teams of two. Simply having students sit and write answers to study questions story after story is...well...pretty boring. Instead, here are a few ideas about how I use question sets like this one with my students:

<https://laurarandazzo.com/2017/06/23/conquering-question-fatigue/>

Some students may need to finish the questions as homework.

4. **Day 2:** Collect students' answers to yesterday's questions. Then, launch a class discussion as you go over the answers to all of the questions. See pages 7-8 for answers/discussion starters. This is an important step, as it will help solidify students' understanding of the deeper themes and techniques used by Poe. The discussion is always rich and serves as a good model for students who might struggle with literary analysis.

5. Hand out the storytelling arc worksheet on page 9. I allow students to work for the rest of the period as they fill in their arcs. Most students will finish by the end of the period, but a few may need to finish as homework. I've included a completed arc for you to use as a grading key or to project as you cover the answers together on Day 3, if you wish.

Thanks!

Laura Randazzo

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YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkLWIURymmMmvyD6lm2qBoQ>

# The Cask of Amontillado

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. At length I would be avenged; this was a point definitely settled—but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation.

He had a weak point—this Fortunato—although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part, their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity, to practice imposture upon the British and Austrian millionaires. In painting and gemmery, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack, but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially; I was skillful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the

conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

I said to him, “My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking today. But

I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts.”

By Edgar Allan Poe

“How?” said he. “Amontillado? A pipe? Impossible! And in the middle of the carnival!”

“I have my doubts,” I replied, “and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain.”

“Amontillado!”

“I have my doubts.”

“Amontillado!”

“And I must satisfy them.”

“Amontillado!”

“As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchresi. If anyone has a critical turn, it is he. He will tell me—”

“Luchresi cannot tell Amontillado from sherry.”

“And yet some fools will have it said that his taste is a match for your own.”

“Come, let us go.”

“Whither?”

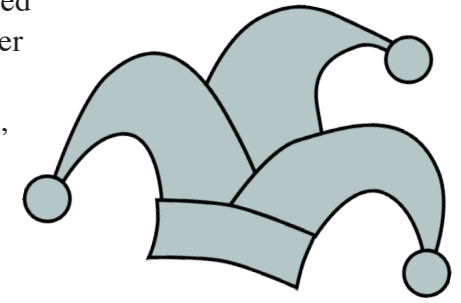
“To your vaults.”

“My friend, no. I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchresi—”

“I have no engagement. Come.”

“My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre.”

“Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado!”



You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchresi, he cannot distinguish sherry from Amontillado.”

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm and, putting on a mask of black silk and drawing a cloak closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honor of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux, and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together upon the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

“The pipe,” he said.

“It is farther on,” said, “but observe the white webwork which gleams from these cavern walls.”

He turned towards me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication.

“Nitre?” he asked, at length.

“Nitre,” I replied. “How long have you had that cough?”

“Ugh! ugh! ugh! –ugh! ugh! ugh! –ugh! ugh! ugh! –ugh! ugh! ugh! –ugh! ugh! ugh!”

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

“It is nothing,” he said, at last.

“Come,” I said, with decision, “we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me, it is no matter. We will go back. You will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchresi—”

“Enough,” he said. “The cough’s a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I

shall not die of a cough.”

“True—true,” I replied, “and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily...but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damp.”

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould.

“Drink,” I said, presenting him the wine. He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

“I drink,” he said, “to the buried that repose around us.”

“And I to your long life.”

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

“These vaults,” he said, “are extensive.”

“The Montresors,” I replied, “were a great and numerous family.”

“I forget your arms.”

“A huge human foot d’or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel.”

“And the motto?”

“Nemo me impune lacessit.” (No one attacks me with impunity.)

“Good!” he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled.

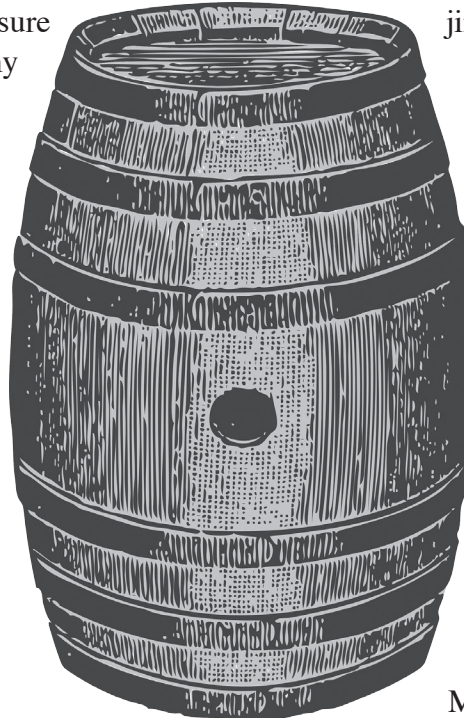
My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through long walls of piled skeletons, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

“The nitre!” I said. “See, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river’s bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough—”

“It is nothing,” he said. “Let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc.”

I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grave. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle

Image credit: Pixabay, Public domain



upwards with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.

“You do not comprehend?” he said

“Not I,” I replied.

“Then you are not of the brotherhood.”

“How?”

“You are not of the masons.”

“Yes, yes,” I said, “yes, yes.”

“You? Impossible! A mason?”

“A mason,” I replied.

“A sign,” he said, “a sign.”

“It is this,” I answered, producing from beneath the folds of my cloak a trowel.

“You jest,” he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. “But let us proceed to the Amontillado.”

“Be it so,” I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our route in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth side the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the



earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior crypt or recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavored to pry into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.

“Proceed,” I said. “Herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchresi—”

“He is an ignoramus,” interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant, he had reached the extremity of the niche, and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain,

from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key, I stepped back from the recess.

“Pass your hand,” I said, “over the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed, it is very damp. Once more, let me implore you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power.”

“The Amontillado!” ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

“True,” I replied, “the Amontillado.”

As I said these words, I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a

quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was not the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labors and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment, I hesitated; I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess, but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall; I replied to the yells of him who clamored. I re-echoed, I aided, I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamorer grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said: "Ha! ha! ha! –he! he! he! –a very good joke, indeed –an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo –he! he! he! –over our wine –he! he! he!"

"The Amontillado!" I said.

"He! he! he! –he! he! he! –yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone."

"Yes," I said, "let us be gone."

"For the love of God, Montresor!"

"Yes," I said, "for the love of God!"

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud–

"Fortunato!"

No answer. I called again–

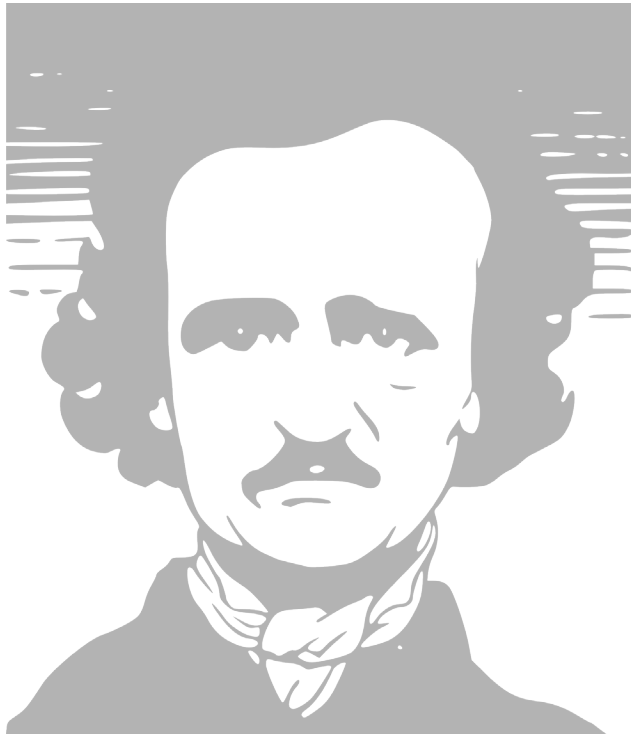
"Fortunato!"

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick; it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so. I hastened to make an end of my labor. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century, no mortal has disturbed them. In pace requiescat! (Rest in peace.)

## The Cask of Amontillado – Questions

On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions. To receive credit, you must write complete, thoughtful sentences.

1. Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration to make a point. Look at the first paragraph. What phrase used by the narrator is an example of hyperbole? Write down the full sentence that includes the hyperbolic element. Does this line make you more sympathetic or less toward the narrator/murderer? Why?



you've read or a film/T.V. show you've seen in which this type of villain exists.

4. Fortunato, who has been out drinking and enjoying Carnival, is wearing a clown's hat. Symbolically, why is this an interesting—and appropriate—costume choice by the writer, Edgar Allan Poe?

2. Montresor tells us, "A wrong is unre-dressed when retri-bution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong." In your own words, explain what this means.

3. What is it about Montresor that makes him an especially effective enemy to Fortunato? Give an example from a book

5. To whom, do you suppose, is Montresor telling this story? Upon what evidence do you base your assumption?

6. Name three of the many clever things Montresor does to lure Fortunato into his trap.

7. How did Montresor ensure that no servants would be around to witness the crime?

8. Poe uses several elements of foreshadowing. Write down (or paraphrase) two lines that foreshadow the grisly event at the end of the tale.

9. Locate and write down a line that includes verbal irony.

10. When Montresor offers the Medoc wine to Fortunato, what is the reason he gives for wanting the other man to drink? What is the real reason? Why does Montresor also have a drink?

11. At the end of the story, what makes Montresor feel sick?

12. Is Montresor a reliable or unreliable narrator? Explain your answer.

13. Poe is a master at creating an eerie, suspenseful mood in his stories. Dig back into the text of this story and write down two lines that help establish this mood. Yes, I want you to write down the full line.

14. Montresor acts as judge, jury, and executioner of Fortunato. Is there any crime/offense that Fortunato could have unwittingly committed that would make Montresor's rage seem reasonable to you? Do you think individuals are ever justified in taking justice into their own hands? Explain your thoughts.

## The Cask of Amontillado

1. Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration to make a point. Look at the first paragraph. What phrase used by the narrator is an example of hyperbole? Write down the full sentence that includes the hyperbolic element. Does this line make you more sympathetic or less toward the narrator/murderer? Why? The hyperbolic line is: "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge." Obviously, Fortunato hasn't harmed Montresor a full 1,000 times. Students' answers to the second part will vary, but the line makes me less sympathetic because I can't imagine Fortunato has done anything so terrible as to warrant this brutal killing. Montresor is exaggerating (and not actually explaining) Fortunato's offenses.

2. Montresor tells us, "A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong." In your own words, explain what this means. Answers will vary, but the first idea here is that, even if a victim gets revenge on the person who wronged him/her, there's no complete revenge if the victim is soured by the event/poisoned by the pursuit of revenge. The second part means that revenge alone isn't enough when someone's done you wrong. You not only need to get your revenge, but the person who did you wrong needs to KNOW that you've won. It's the aggressor's knowledge of being bested that makes the revenge truly sweet, Montresor seems to be saying.

3. What is it about Montresor that makes him an especially effective enemy to Fortunato? Give an example from a book you've read or a film/T.V. show you've seen in which this type of villain exists. Montresor is effective because Fortunato doesn't know that he's an enemy. An enemy disguised as a friend is far more dangerous than an openly pronounced foe because the "frenemy" has access to you and information about your life that an adversary would not easily know. This two-faced villain reminds me of Iago from Shakespeare's play *Othello*. Iago, one of Othello's trusted military leaders, secretly hates Othello and easily lies to his face, setting traps and manipulations that lead the military general to kill his beloved wife and end his own life. It's fascinating—and scary—to watch.

4. Fortunato, who has been out drinking and enjoying Carnival, is wearing a clown's hat. Symbolically, why is this an interesting—and appropriate—costume choice by the writer, Edgar Allan Poe? Fortunato is dressed like a court jester or clown and he is, in fact, a fool who falls into Montresor's trap. The clothing makes the man in this story. Fortunato is fooled by Montresor, but it is also partly Fortunato's own foolish ego that leads him into peril, as he feels competitive with Luchresi and wants to present himself as the better man. Finally, the costume emphasizes the irony of Fortunato's name, which could loosely translate to "fortunate" in English. He, of course, is just the opposite of fortunate, as he will die in the catacombs.

5. To whom, do you suppose, is Montresor telling this story? Upon what evidence do you base your assumption? It is not clear to whom Montresor speaks, but it would have to be a trusted friend or, perhaps, even God himself. The narration takes place 50 years after the murder, so it's also likely that this is a death-bed confession to a religious minister. The second sentence hints at this with the "You, who so well know the nature of my soul," line. Students' answers will vary.

6. Name three of the many clever things Montresor does to lure Fortunato into his trap. There are several answers that work here. First, he dangles a rare treat, the Amontillado, before Fortunato, who is a known wine connoisseur. Second, he finds Fortunato on a party night when he's already a bit drunk and his defenses are down. Third, he continues to ply Fortunato with alcohol to further blur his judgment. Fourth, he uses the threat of Fortunato losing his opportunity to sample the Amontillado to a rival, Luchresi. Fifth, he pretends several times that it would be best for them not to proceed further down the path, knowing that Fortunato will insist they continue.

7. How did Montresor ensure that no servants would be around to witness the crime? He told them he would be gone all night and ordered them to stay in the house instead of going to the city-wide party. Of course, the moment he left out the front door, they all left out the back door. When the cat's away, the mice will play, as the old saying goes.

8. Poe uses several elements of foreshadowing. Write down (or paraphrase) two lines that foreshadow the grisly event at the end of the tale. 1. "Enough," [Fortunato] said. "The cough's a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough." 2. Montresor has brought a trowel with him to the catacombs, which he jokingly shows to Fortunato, who is too thick to ask questions.

9. Locate and write down a line that includes verbal irony. When the two men are drinking the Medoc, Fortunato says, "I drink...to the buried that repose around us." Then, Montresor says, "And I to your long life." This is ironic because Montresor intends for just the opposite to be true.

10. When Montresor offers the Medoc wine to Fortunato, what is the reason he gives for wanting the other man to drink? What is the real reason? Why does Montresor also have a drink? 1. He says that Fortunato should drink because it will help warm him, countering the damp coldness of the underground tunnels. 2. He really, though, just wants to keep Fortunato drunk. 3. He drinks some himself probably to stay warm, but also probably to steel his nerves against the crime he's about to commit.

11. At the end of the story, what makes Montresor feel sick? It's most likely a combination of the dampness of the tunnels and the nitre, or potassium nitrate, in the air. He does not feel sick about what he's done to Fortunato. There's no guilt or remorse here. He's reacting physically to the damp, ill environment.

12. Is Montresor a reliable or unreliable narrator? Explain your answer. Montresor is the classic unreliable narrator. We should not fully believe everything he says, as he is clearly mentally deranged. He's a murderer who never gives us a full or satisfying reason for the murder. He's acting on emotion, but we are not able to tell if his actions are justified and we should sense that they probably aren't. Also, he's telling this story 50 years later, meaning that details and accuracies have certainly faded with time.

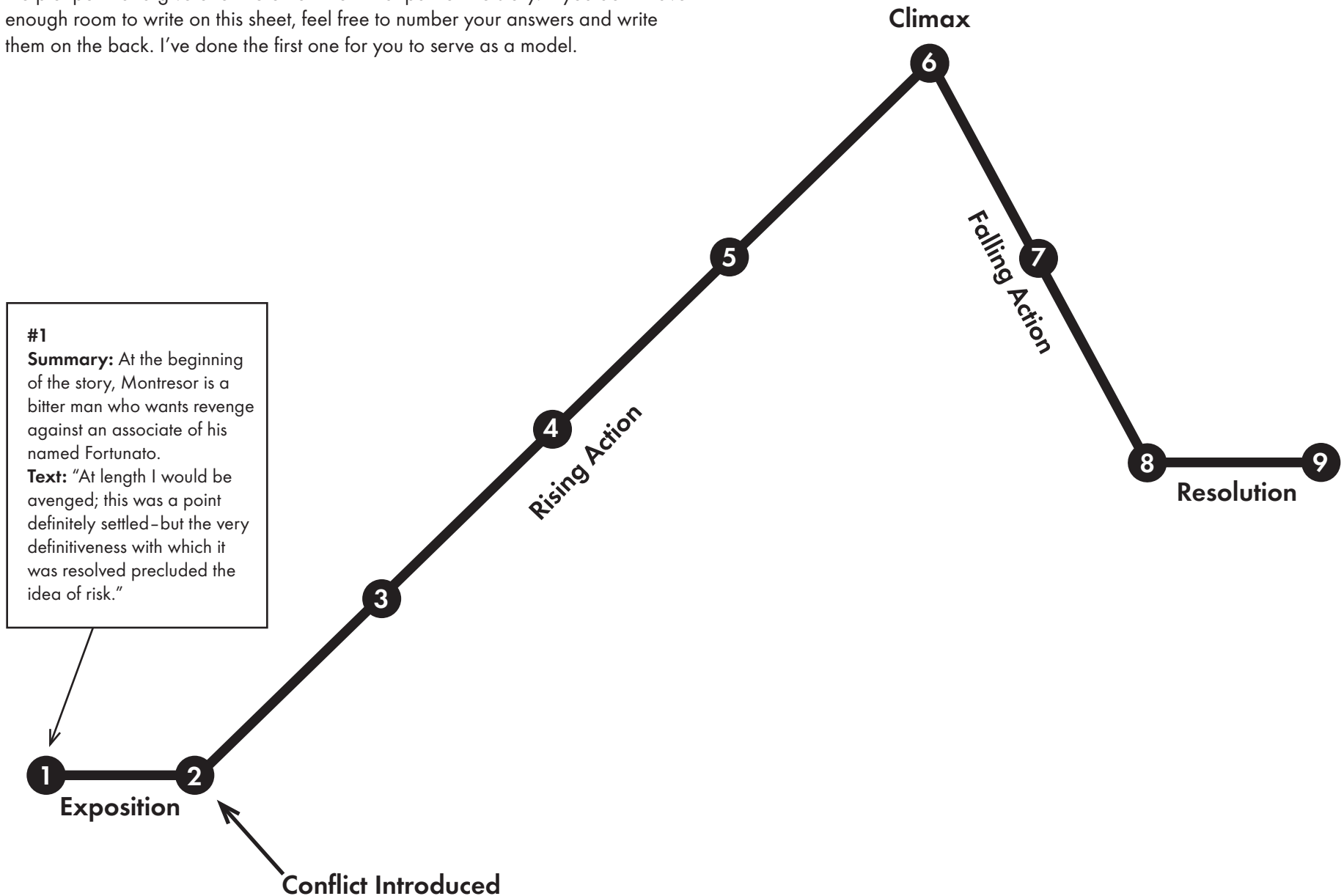
13. Poe is a master at creating an eerie, suspenseful mood in his stories. Dig back into the text of this story and write down two lines that help establish this mood. Yes, I want you to write down the full line. Answers will vary, as there are many creepy descriptions of the setting, but I like: 1. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. 2. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

14. Montresor acts as judge, jury, and executioner of Fortunato. Is there any crime/offense that Fortunato could have unwittingly committed that would make Montresor's rage seem reasonable to you? Do you think individuals are ever justified in taking justice into their own hands? Explain your thoughts. Answers will vary on this question. The first question is tricky because Fortunato is clueless that Montresor holds a grudge against him. This makes the reader think that the offenses weren't really as major as Montresor perceives them to be. The second question always leads to a lively class discussion, as students have passionate feelings about right/wrong and our criminal justice system.



# The Cask of Amontillado

**Directions:** For each of the nine points on the Storytelling Arc below, summarize the plot point and give one line of text from that part of the story. If you don't have enough room to write on this sheet, feel free to number your answers and write them on the back. I've done the first one for you to serve as a model.



# The Cask of Amontillado

## KEY

**Directions:** For each of the nine points on the Storytelling Arc below, summarize the plot point and give one line of text from that part of the story. If you don't have enough room to write on this sheet, feel free to number your answers and write them on the back. I've done the first one for you to serve as a model.

