

*“The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world.”*  
—Edgar Allan Poe

## Annabel Lee    The Bells

Poetry by EDGAR ALLAN POE

### Connect to Your Life

**Why Poetry?** Think of the last time you read a poem or listened to a song. What effect did the experience have on you? Why do you think writers sometimes choose to express feelings or thoughts in a poem rather than in another form of writing? Jot down your responses.

### Build Background

**Poetry of Poe** Edgar Allan Poe believed the death of a beautiful woman to be the topic most worthy of poetry. The first poem you will read, “Annabel Lee,” is his loving tribute to his young wife, Virginia. He probably started composing the poem even before she died, as a way of coping with the agony of her five-year illness. The poem was published on the day of Poe’s own death.

Poe also felt that a poem should possess musical qualities, for he viewed music as one of the highest forms of artistic expression. The second poem, “The Bells,” was written by Poe as an experiment with the more musical aspects of poetry.

### Focus Your Reading

**LITERARY ANALYSIS    SOUND DEVICES** Poe used every poetic technique available to transform his words into music, including the following:

**Rhyme:** similar sounds at the ends of two or more words  
(ago and know)

**Alliteration:** repetition of consonant sounds at the beginnings of words (sounding sea)

**Assonance:** repetition of a vowel sound within nonrhyming words (night, tide, lie)

While you are reading the poems, notice how “Annabel Lee” becomes increasingly musical and how closely “The Bells” echoes the actual sounds of bells.

**ACTIVE READING    UNDERSTANDING POETRY** Be aware that Poe’s vocabulary and complex sentence structure may challenge you. Use these suggestions:

- Try reading the poems aloud to help you hear the musical quality of the words.
- Pay attention to the punctuation, which signals where an idea breaks or stops. Punctuation can also suggest the mood or emotion behind a phrase.
- Refer to the Guide for Reading annotations for definitions of difficult words or phrases.
- Read each poem more than once.

**READER’S NOTEBOOK** Record any questions you may have about the poems as you read.

Annabel  
Lee



*Study of a Head for The Mill*, Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833–1898). Graphite and wash, 7¼" × 6½", Bankside Gallery, London.

It was many and many a year ago,  
In a kingdom by the sea,  
That a maiden there lived whom you may know  
By the name of Annabel Lee;—  
And this maiden she lived with no other thought  
Than to love and be loved by me.

*She* was a child and *I* was a child,  
In this kingdom by the sea,  
But we loved with a love that was more than love—  
I and my Annabel Lee—  
With a love that the wingéd seraphs of Heaven  
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,  
In this kingdom by the sea,  
A wind blew out of a cloud by night  
Chilling my Annabel Lee;

11 **seraphs** (sər'əfs): any of the highest order of angels.  
12 **coveted**: envied.

So that her high-born kinsmen came  
And bore her away from me,  
To shut her up in a sepulcher  
20 In this kingdom by the sea.

19 **sepulcher** (səp'əl-kər): a place for burial; tomb.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,  
Went envying her and me;  
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,  
In this kingdom by the sea)  
25 That the wind came out of the cloud chilling  
And killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love  
Of those who were older than we—  
Of many far wiser than we—  
30 And neither the angels in Heaven above  
Nor the demons down under the sea  
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:—

32 **dissever**: disunite; separate.

For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams  
35 Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And the stars never rise but I feel the bright eyes  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride  
40 In her sepulcher there by the sea—  
In her tomb by the side of the sea.

### Thinking Through the Literature

1. After reading "Annabel Lee," what images linger in your mind?
2. What effect does this poem have on you? What words, phrases, or images do you think contribute to this effect?
3. How well is the speaker coping with his bride's death?
  - the speaker's description of the death of Annabel Lee
  - the sentiments described in lines 34–37
  - the speaker's nightly activities, described in lines 38–41
4. How would you define the speaker's love for Annabel Lee? Would you want to feel or be the object of such a love? Explain why or why not.

# The Bells

## I

Hear the sledges with the bells—  
Silver bells!

*What* a world of merriment their melody foretells!

How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,  
In the icy air of night!

While the stars that oversprinkle  
All the Heavens, seem to twinkle  
With a crystalline delight;

Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,

To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells  
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells—

— From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

## II

Hear the mellow wedding bells—  
Golden bells!

*What* a world of happiness their harmony foretells!

Through the balmy air of night  
How they ring out their delight!—

From the molten-golden notes,  
And all in tune,

What a liquid ditty floats

To the turtle-dove that listens while she gloats  
On the moon!

Oh, from out the sounding cells,

*What* a gush of euphony voluminously wells!

How it swells!

How it dwells

On the Future!—how it tells

Of the rapture that impels

To the swinging and the ringing

Of the bells, bells, bells!—

Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells—

To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

### GUIDE FOR READING

1 sledges (sləj'fz): sleighs.

10 Runic (rōō'nŷk): magical.

11 tintinnabulation  
(tŷn'tŷ-năb'yə-lă'shən): ringing.

18 balmy (bă'mē): mild.

22 ditty: a simple song.

23 turtle-dove: a bird resembling a pigeon; gloats: gazes with delight.

26 euphony (yōō'fə-nē): sweet sound or harmony; voluminously (və-lōō'mə-nēs-lē): so as to fill a large space.

32-34 What effect do you think Poe creates with this use of repetition?

III

Hear the loud alarum bells—  
Brazen bells!

*What* tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!

40 In the startled ear of Night  
How they scream out their affright!  
Too much horrified to speak,  
They can only shriek, shriek,  
Out of tune,

45 In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire—  
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,  
Leaping higher, higher, higher,  
With a desperate desire

50 And a resolute endeavor  
Now—now to sit, or never,  
By the side of the pale-faced moon.

Oh, the bells, bells, bells!  
What a tale their terror tells  
Of despair!  
How they clang and clash and roar!

55 What a horror they outpour  
In the bosom of the palpitating air!  
Yet the ear, it fully knows,

60 By the twanging  
And the clanging,  
How the danger ebbs and flows:—  
Yes, the ear distinctly tells,

65 In the jangling  
And the wrangling,  
How the danger sinks and swells,  
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells—  
Of the bells—

Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells—  
In the clamor and the clangor of the bells.

37 brazen (brā'zən):  
made of brass; also, loud  
harsh.

40 affright: fear.

45 expostulation  
(ĭk-spōs'che-lā'shən): argun

56 palpitating (pāl'pĭ-tā'tĭn)  
trembling.

65 by the sinking . . . of the  
bells: Visualize what is hap-  
pening at this point. How  
does this scene contrast with  
those described earlier in the  
poem?



IV

Hear the tolling of the bells—  
Iron bells!

*What* a world of solemn thought their monody compels!

In the silence of the night  
How we shiver with affright  
At the melancholy meaning of the tone!  
For every sound that floats  
From the rust within their throats  
Is a groan.

And the people—ah, the people  
They that dwell up in the steeple  
All alone,

And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,  
In that muffled monotone,  
Feel a glory in so rolling

On the human heart a stone—  
They are neither man nor woman—  
They are neither brute nor human,

They are Ghouls:—  
And their king it is who tolls:—  
And he rolls, rolls, rolls, rolls

A Paeon from the bells!  
And his merry bosom swells  
With the Paeon of the bells!

And he dances and he yells;  
Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,

To the Paeon of the bells—  
Of the bells:—

Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
To the throbbing of the bells—

Of the bells, bells, bells—  
To the sobbing of the bells:—  
Keeping time, time, time,

As he knells, knells, knells,  
In a happy Runic rhyme,  
To the rolling of the bells—

Of the bells, bells, bells:—  
To the tolling of the bells—

Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells—

To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

**70 tolling:** sounding slowly in repeated single tones.

**72 monody** (mŏn'ə-dē): poem in which the speaker mourns another's death.

**83 monotone:** a succession of sounds or words uttered in a single tone of voice.

**91 Paeon** (pē'en): a song of joyful praise.



**105 knells:** rings slowly and solemnly.

## Connect to the Literature

1. **What Do You Think?**  
What was the first thought you had as you finished "The Bells"?

### Comprehension Check

- What four types of bells are described in the poem?
- In what kinds of situations do bells ring?

## Think Critically

2. Review the poem, noticing the changes from stanza to stanza. What overall effect on his readers do you think Poe wanted to achieve?

THINK ABOUT

- Poe's use of repetition
- his change of setting from stanza to stanza
- his choice of words in each stanza

3. Which type of bell could you "hear" most clearly? Explain your response.

4. **ACTIVE READING UNDERSTANDING POETRY** Review any notes you took about the poems in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK**. Which line or passage from "The Bells" seemed hardest to understand when you first read it? Briefly explain what techniques you used to make its meaning clearer.

## Extend Interpretations

5. **Comparing Texts** Read the two poems again, paying special attention to how they are alike and how they are different. Use a chart like the one shown to record your ideas.

	Annabel Lee	The Bells
Speaker		
Topic		
Effects		

6. **Critic's Corner** To his American contemporary Ralph Waldo Emerson, Poe was merely "the jingle-man," not worthy of respect as a poet. But to the French poets of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Poe was a great master. After studying these two poems, how do you rate Poe as a poet? How do his poems compare to others you've read?
7. **Connect to Life** Do you agree with Poe's judgment that the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetic topic? If not, what do you think is the most poetic subject?

## Literary Analysis

**SOUND DEVICES** You have seen how Poe uses sounds to create a particular effect and emphasize ideas. Following are three of the devices he uses most often:

- **Rhyme** is the occurrence of a similar or identical sound at the ends of two or more words. Internal rhyme in poetry occurs within a line, such as "chilling / And killing" in "Annabel Lee" and "the swinging and the ringing" in "The Bells." **End rhyme** occurs at the ends of lines in both poems.
- **Alliteration** is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginnings of words. Most of the alliteration in "The Bells" is done simply through the use of repeated words.

*From the bells, bells, bells, bells*

- **Assonance** is the repetition of vowel sounds within nonrhyming words.

*mellow wedding bells*

**Activity** Go through the poems and find examples of rhyme, alliteration, and assonance. As you find more examples, try to explain what effects you think these sound devices create.