“The Masque of the Red Death”

by Edgar Allan Poe

**Study Guide**

1. List the characteristics of the disease known as the Red Death.
2. Explain how Poe’s fictional disease both does and does not resemble a couple of real diseases.
3. What is suggested by the name “Prospero”?

Is it a fitting name for a prince who owns lots of land and buildings? Why or why not?

What three words at the start of the second paragraph does the narrator describe Prince Prospero?

1. As people in the prince’s dominion succumb to the Red Death, what does the prince do with his friends?

What do they believe their actions will accomplish?

What does this tell us about him, and about his friends?

1. What sort of lifestyle do they all lead within the castle or abbey?
2. Each of the rooms in which the masque ball is taking place are of a different color. Describe each and what each color suggests to you.

What is different about the seventh room?

1. Why do the guests pause their revelry once each hour?

How do they act during these pauses, and why do you think this is (of what are they being reminded)?

1. What sense does the reader get regarding whether they are good people are not?
2. Whom do people notice for the first time as the clock strikes midnight?
3. How do they react to the costume of the “mummer” or intruder? Why?
4. Which details of the costume could be said to be most likely to produce this reaction?
5. How are the tastes and appearances of Prospero and his guests described? Explain your own observations, but also give at least three words Poe uses in his descriptions, from various parts of the story.
6. How does the Prince react to the intruder’s mummer’s costume?

Where does the mummer go, and what does Prince Prospero do?

What happens when the Prospero lifts a knife to him?

1. What do people discover when they finally confront the mummer?
2. Look at the Seven Ages of Man soliloquy from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. How might it relate to the rooms of the abbey and themes in the story?
3. What happens to all the partyers by the end of the story?
4. What does Poe seem to be saying in the story about wealth and power?

What elements of Poe’s own life may have influenced his writing of this story?

1. Who are the insiders and the outsiders in the story?
2. What could the mummer’s entrance into the abbey symbolize?
3. What modern-day issues bear some relationship to “The Masque of the Red Death,” and how?