

THINK

1. Refer to one or more details from the text to support your understanding of what the speaker was doing and what state of mind he was in when the encounter with the Raven occurred.

He was in his bedroom/study, reading and trying to forget the loss of Lenore. He tells us,

Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore...

which indicates that he is depressed. He is also very nervous, and his surroundings seem to scare him, as when he is frightened by the shadows and the drapes:

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor....
And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;...

2. Who or what does the speaker originally think is tapping at his door? Use quotes from the text to support your answer.

At first he thought it was a “visitor,” whom he asks to wait a moment while he gets to the door. So, he goes from a rational assumption to an irrational one in a matter of seconds. Next, though, he describes how he “opened wide the door” and called “Lenore.”

3. Explain what the speaker hopes the Raven will tell him. Support your answer with textual evidence.

First he wants to know its name, but after a little while he seems to think it can foretell the future and that it comes from the abode of the dead. He implores it to tell him if there will be “balm in Gilead” for him—in other words, will he ever feel better? Then he demands the Raven tell him if he will “clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore. In the afterlife.

WRITE

Look carefully at the section of the poem after the speaker starts to talk to the Raven. At first, what does he realize about its one answer, "Nevermore"? Support your response with evidence from the text.

He realizes that “Nevermore” isn’t an appropriate response to “What is your name?” He thinks,

“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of ‘Never—nevermore.’”

In other words, the bird is a pet raised by some sad person who kept saying “nevermore” over and over. He knows that “its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore.”

At what point does Poe indicate the speaker is losing his grasp on reality? Quote the line or lines below.

He isn't dealing with the reality that he acknowledges only moments ago when he suddenly thinks the bird's one word has MEANING—he wondered what “this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore/Meant in croaking ““Nevermore.””

Then he seems to start having sensory hallucinations when he describes how “the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer/Swung by seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.”