Edgar Allan Poe
1809 - 1849

Where did he live?

✦born in Boston, MA

✦lived in:

Baltimore

Philadelphia

New York

Poe's cottage in
the Bronx

Family Life

✦both parents died by the time he was 2 years old

✦raised by foster parents, Frances and John Allan

✦moved to England for a

   while with his foster
   parents

John Allan

Youth

✦John Allan alternately spoiled and severely disciplined Poe

✦Acquired gambling debts at University of Virginia

✦Allan cuts him off, so…

✦He had to leave college and join the US Army

Poe:West Point cadet

Marriage

- At age 22, he moved into his aunt's house
- There he fell in love with his aunt's daughter, Virginia Clemm
- They married in 1836, when Virginia was only 13 years old (he was 27)
- She died of tuberculosis at 25

Career

- Published his first book of poems in 1827, at his own expense
- He published many poems and short stories and became well known as a critic and writer
- His only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,* was published in 1838
- *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque,* published 1840

Death

✦Uncertainty surrounding his death:

✦Alcoholism?

✦Murder?

✦Cirrhosis? or rabies?

✦Most agree that he was found unconscious in the street

October 7, 1849

Gothic themes in Poe's work

recurring themes deal with questions of death including:

✦ its physical signs

✦the effects of decomposition

✦concerns of premature burial

✦the reanimation of the dead

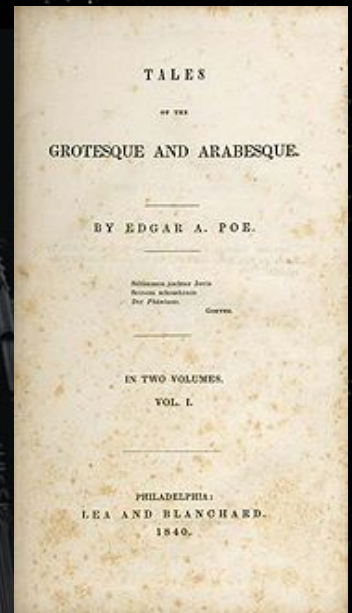✦mourning the loss of a woman

Poe's Legacy

Father of:

✦The modern short story

✦The detective story

✦The horror genre

Important Works

Short Stories

- ✦ "Ligeia", 1838
- ✦ "The Fall of the House of Usher", 1839
- ✦ "Murders in the Rue Morgue", 1841
- ✦ "The Purloined Letter", 1844
- ✦ "Eleonora", 1850
- ✦ "The Masque of the Red Death", 1850
- ✦ "The Tell-Tale Heart", 1850

TALES
OF THE
GROTESQUE AND ARABESQUE.

BY EDGAR A. POE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

PHILADELPHIA:
LEA AND BLANCHARD.
1840.

Important Works

Poems

✦"The Raven," 1845

✦"Annabel Lee," 1849

✦"The Bells," 1849
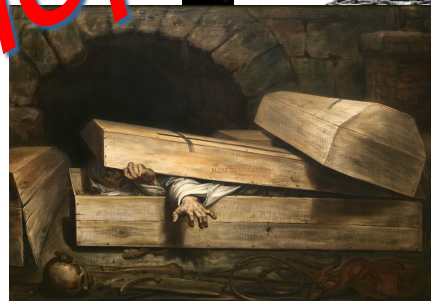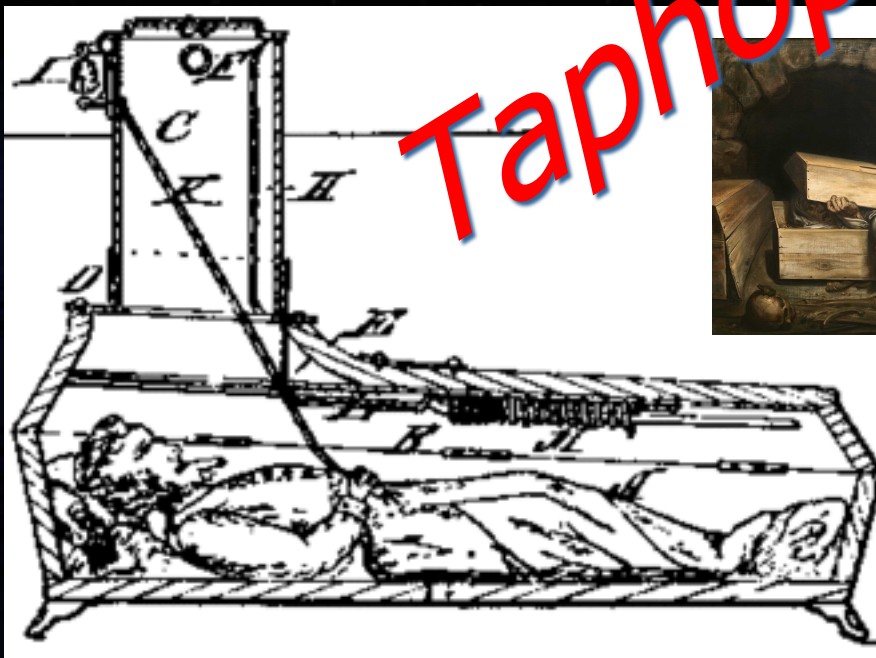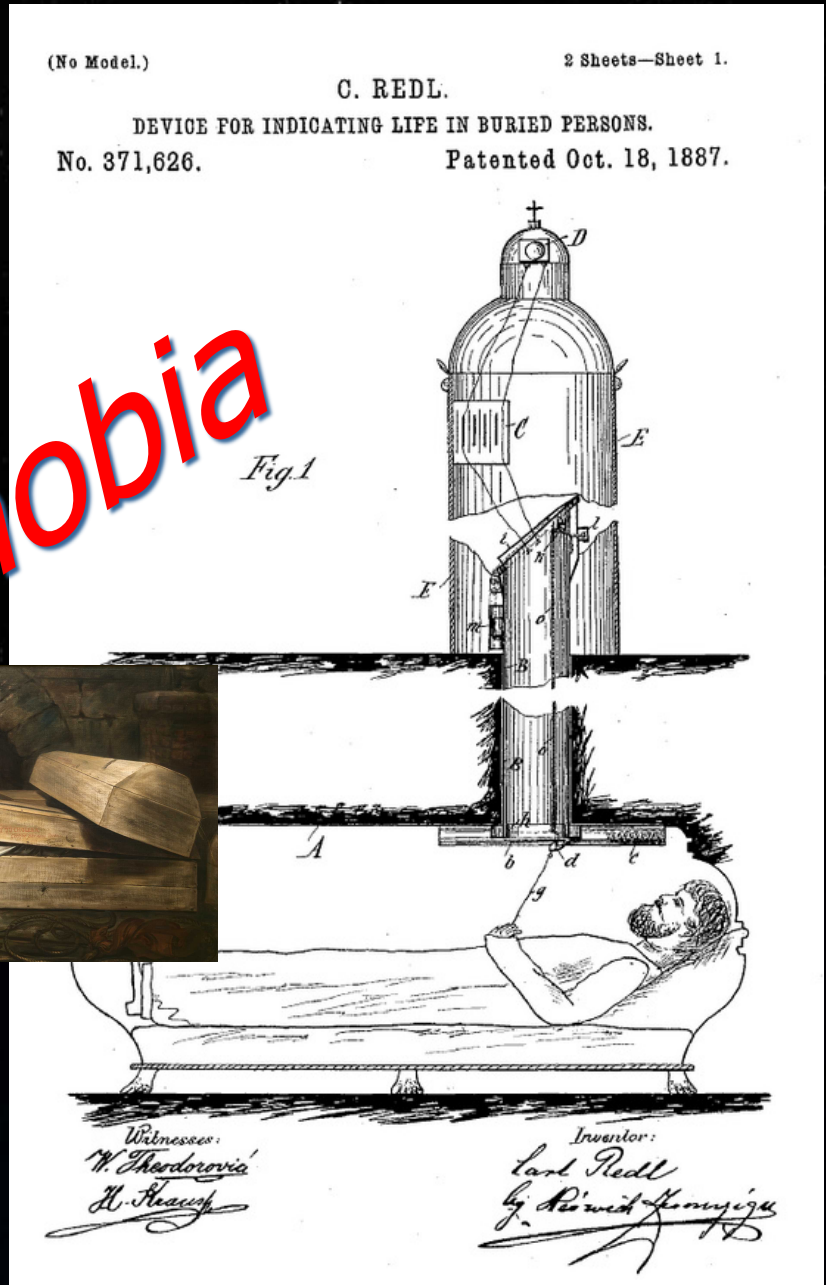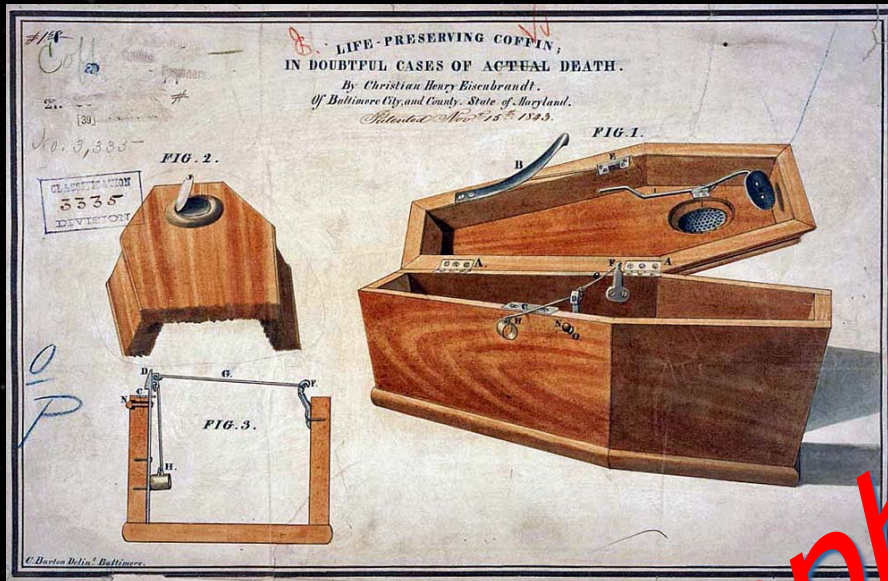
Poe Stories Project

- "The Black Cat"– a narrator driven to a violent rage by his cat

- "The Masque of Red Death"– Death crashes a ball during the Plague

- "Tale Tale Heart"– a narrator driven mad by guilt

- "The Cask of Amontillado"– a tale of ghastly revenge

- "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether"– an asylum institutes a curious new treatment

- "Berenice"– man obsesses over his deteriorating lover's perfect teeth

Possible areas of focus:

- Plot development (stages)
- Plot devices (foreshadowing, etc.)
- Symbolism/allegory
- Narration style and effects
- Character development
- Setting & atmosphere
- Diction (including allusions)
- Connection to Poe's life/times

Taphophobia

Poe's
"Philosophy of
Composition"

Overview

✦ Written in 1846

✦ Riding the wave of success of

"The Raven"

✦ Provides insights into the process of writing poetry and short fiction

✦ Inspired by writings of:

✦ Charles Dickens

✦ William Godwin- father of Mary Shelly of *Frankenstein* fame

✦ Advocates step-by-step process of writing

Basic Guidelines

✦CHOOSE THE "SINGULAR EFFECT" FIRST (the life "truth")

✦Maintain originality

✦Keep the ending in sight

✦Sustain a "unity of impression"

  Every detail of story geared toward single effect

✦Decide on a suitable length- -- should be read in <u>one</u> sitting

Basic Guidelines

✦ Aim for "universally applicable" ideas
   ✦ For poetry: The Soul of Beauty
   ✦ For prose (fiction):

            Passion of Heart

            Truth in human behavior

Or better yet, combine the two ideas:
✦ Melancholy arising over the death
        of a beautiful woman

✦ Fear, lust, greed, guilt, etc. leading to madness
        and ghastly behavior

Important Steps

- ✓ To produce the "Singular Effect":
  1. Choose a locale that reinforces the tone
  2. Develop characters that reinforce the effect
- ✓ Choose a mechanism, a pivotpoint, around which the narrative revolves:

  "Nevermore" in "The Raven" or
  the beating heart in "The Tell-Tale Heart" or
  the eye in "The Black Cat" and many others
- ✓ <u>Always</u> keep the ending in sight