Vocabulary Study
The Tell-Tale Heart by Edgar Allan Poe

*Note: The words in each section are listed in alphabetical order. The words, definitions, and quotations are presented in the order in which they appear in *Ghostly Tales and Eerie Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, Grosset and Dunlap, 1993.*

**List 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>acute</th>
<th>foresight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conceived</td>
<td>inquiring</td>
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<tr>
<td>cunningly</td>
<td>object</td>
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<tr>
<td>dissimulation</td>
<td>proceeded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extent</td>
<td>profound</td>
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</tbody>
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1. **acute** *(uh-kyoot)* *adj.* sensitive to details; keen

   derivatives: acutely, acuteness

   “The disease had sharpened my sense—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute.”

2. **conceived** *(kuhn-seev’d)* *v.* to form an idea; think

   derivatives: conceive, conceiving

   “It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night.”

3. **object** *(ob-jekt)* *n.* the end toward which effort or action is directed; goal; purpose

   derivatives: objective

   “Object there was none.”

4. **proceeded** *(pruh-seed-ed)* *v.* to go on to do something

   derivatives: proceed, proceeding

   “You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work!”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. foresight (fohr-sahyt)</th>
<th>care or provision for the future; provident care; prudence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>derivatives: foresighted, foresightedly, foresightedness, foresightful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work!”</td>
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<tr>
<th>6. dissimulation</th>
<th>(dih-sim-yuh-ley-shuhn)</th>
<th>the act of concealing one’s true motives, thoughts, etc., by some pretense; feigning; hypocrisy</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>derivatives: dissimulate, dissimulative, dissimulator</td>
<td></td>
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<td>“You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work!”</td>
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<tr>
<th>7. cunningly (kuhn-ing-ly)</th>
<th>adv. 1. a skill performed in a shrewd or sly manner, as in deceiving; craftiness; guile. 2. performed with adeptness; dexterity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>derivatives: cunning, cunningness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in!”</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>8. inquiring</th>
<th>(in-kwahy-r-ing)</th>
<th>v. to seek information by questioning; ask</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>derivatives: inquire, inquired, enquire, inquirer, inquirable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>9. profound</th>
<th>(pruh-found)</th>
<th>adj. 1. having deep insight or understanding. 2. being or going far beneath what is superficial, external, or obvious</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>derivatives: profounder, profoundest, profoundly, profundity, profundness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.”</td>
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</table>
10. **extent** (ik-stent) *n.* the space or degree to which a thing extends; length, area, volume, or scope

derivatives: none

“Never before that night, had I felt the **extent** of my own powers—of my sagacity.”
List 2

concealment  
sagrantly

dismembered  
stalked

hearkening  
suppositions

mark  
unperceived

scantlings  
wane

1. **sagacity** (sub-gas-i-tee) *n.* acuteness of mental discernment and soundness of judgment

derivatives: sage, sagacious

   “Never before that night, had I felt the extent of my own powers—of my **sagacity**.”

2. **hearkening** (hahr-kuhn) *v.* to listen to; hear

derivatives: hearken, hark

   “He was still sitting up in the bed listening;—just as I have done, night after night, **hearkening** to the death watches in the wall.”

3. **suppositions** (suhp-uh-zish-uhn) *n.* something that is supposed; assumption; hypothesis

derivative: supposition

   “Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these **suppositions**; but he had found all in vain.”

4. **stalked** (stawkt) *v.* to proceed in a steady, deliberate, or sinister manner

derivative: stalk, stalking

   “All in vain; because Death, in approaching him, had **stalked** with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim.”

5. **unperceived** (uhn-per-seevd) *v.* to not be aware of, to not know or identify by means of the senses

derivatives: perceive

   “And it was the mournful influence of the **unperceived** shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to **feel** the presence of my head within the room.”

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<th><strong>6. mark</strong> (mahrk) v. to take notice; give attention; consider</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>derivatives: marked, marking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It grew louder, I say, louder every moment!—do you <strong>mark</strong> me well?”</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th><strong>7. concealment</strong> (kuhn-seel-muhnt) n. the act of hiding; to withdraw or remove from observation; to cover or keep from sight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>derivatives: conceal, concealable</td>
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<tr>
<td>“If you still think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the <strong>concealment</strong> of the body.”</td>
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<th><strong>8. waned</strong> (weynd) v. to draw to a close; approach an end</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>derivatives: wane, waning</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The night <strong>waned</strong>, and I worked hastily, but in silence.”</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>9. dismembered</strong> (dis-mem-berd) v. 1. to deprive of limbs; divide limb from limb. 2. to divide into parts; cut to pieces; mutilate</th>
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<tr>
<td>derivatives: dismember, dismemberment</td>
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<tr>
<td>“First of all I <strong>dismembered</strong> the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.”</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>10. scantlings</strong> (skant-lings) n. timbers of relatively slight width and thickness, as a stud or rafter in a house frame</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>derivatives: scantling</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the <strong>scantlings</strong>.”</td>
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# List 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>audacity</th>
<th>raved</th>
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<tr>
<td>derision</td>
<td>reposed</td>
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<tr>
<td>ere</td>
<td>suavity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gesticulations</td>
<td>vehemently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manner</td>
<td>wary</td>
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</table>

1. **wary (wair-ee) adj.** 1. watchful; being on one’s guard against danger. 2. arising from or characterized by caution
   
   derivatives: warier, wariest, warily, wariness
   
   “There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood-spot whatever. I had been too **wary** for that.”

2. **suavity (swah-vi-tee) n.** smoothly agreeable or courteous actions or manners
   
   derivatives: suavities, suave
   
   “There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect **suavity**, as officers of the police.”

3. **audacity (aw-das-i-tee) n.** 1. boldness or daring, especially with confident or arrogant disregard for personal safety, conventional thought or other restrictions. 2. effrontery or insolence; shameless boldness
   
   derivatives: audacities, audacious
   
   “I brought chairs into the room, and desired them **here** to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild **audacity** of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which **reposed** the corpse of the victim.”

4. **reposed (ri-pohzd) v.** to lie dead
   
   derivatives: repose, reposing
   
   “I brought chairs into the room, and desired them **here** to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which **reposed** the corpse of the victim.”
5. **manner** (man-er) *n.* a person’s outward bearing; way of speaking to and treating others 
   derivatives: none
   “The officers were satisfied. My *manner* had convinced them.”

6. **ere** (air) *preposition, conjunction* before 
   derivatives: none
   “But, *ere* long, I felt myself growing pale and wished them gone.”

7. **vehemently** (vee-uh-muhnt-lee) *adv.* in a manner that is strongly emotional; intense or passionate 
   derivatives: vehement
   “I talked more quickly—more *vehemently*; but the noise steadily increased.”

8. **gesticulations** (je-stik-yuh-ley-shuhn) *n.* animated or excited gestures 
   derivatives: gesticulation, gesticulate
   “I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent *gesticulations*; but the noise steadily increased.”

9. **raved** (reyvd) *v.* 1. to talk wildly, as in delirium 2. to utter as if in madness 
   derivatives: rave, raving
   “I foamed—I *raved*—I swore!”

10. **derision** (dih-rizh-uhn) *n.* ridicule; mockery 
    derivatives: derisible
    “Anything was more tolerable than this *derision!*”
Fill-in-the-Blank Activity
The Tell-Tale Heart

Using the words below, fill in the blanks with suitable vocabulary choices. Each word or its derivative is used once.

List 1

acute  foresight
conceived  inquiring
cunningly  object
dissimulation  proceeded
extent  profound

1. The narrator’s sense of hearing is so ____________ that he is able to hear bugs in the walls.

2. Ridding himself of the old man’s eye becomes the narrator’s main ____________, which he can only accomplish by taking the old man’s life.

3. Once the narrator ________________ a plan to kill the old man, he is anxious to carry it out.

4. Without hesitation, he ________________ into the old man’s room while he is sleeping.

5. With great ________________, the narrator pretends to care about the old man.

6. With feigned interest in the old man’s health, he was ________________ about his master’s sleeping habits every morning.

7. The more the narrator denies his madness, the more the reader begins to realize the ____________ of his mental illness.

8. He plans the murder with ________________, taking precautions against getting caught.

9. ________________, he sneaks into the old man’s chamber every night without waking him.

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10. The old man is not ________________ enough to recognize that the narrator is a threat to him.
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1. The narrator thrusts his head through a crack in the door, ____________ for the sound of the old man’s breathing.

2. After seven nights of having ________________ the old man in his room, the narrator finally sees the Evil Eye glaring in the darkness.

3. The sound that awakens the old man is so faint that it is almost ________________ by the old man.

4. What the narrator insists is great ________________ the reader realizes is increasing insanity.

5. The old man’s heart beats steadily, but once he was covered by the mattress, it ________________ until it beat no more.

6. The narrator wants the reader to ________________ how carefully he planned and executed his crime.

7. When he ________________ the body, the narrator is careful not to leave even a trace of blood.

8. Because the body is in ________________ under the floor, the narrator has no fear of his crime being discovered by the investigating police officers.

9. After he replaces the ________________ in the floor, three men come knocking at the door.

10. Upon hearing a shriek in the night, the neighbors form the ________________ that something dangerous had happened in the house.

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1. Because the narrator has nothing to fear, he practices _________ and is courteous when speaking to the police.

2. The ____________________ of leading the police to the very room and sitting his chair over the very spot where the corpse is hidden ultimately proves his undoing.

3. The ____________________ in which the narrator speaks to the police begins quite calmly and confidently.

4. The narrator’s tone shifts as he imagines a heart beating, even though the corpse is ____________________ underneath the floor.

5. As the perceived heartbeat becomes louder, the narrator becomes more emotional, speaking ____________________ in order to distract the police from the noise he heard.

6. The wild ____________________ the narrator makes with his hands only make him seem more insane.

7. The narrator assumes the police are treating him with ________________, but actually they are sincerely clueless.

8. As the narrator ________________ and became louder and louder, the suspense in the story builds.

9. _____________ the police know it, the narrator is confessing to a murder of which they had been unaware.
10. Despite being ______________ to attempt to avoid being caught, the narrator confesses his crime.
Multiple Choice Exam
“The Tell-Tale Heart”

1. foresight
   a. prudence
   b. anticipation
   c. preoccupation
   d. foreboding
   e. understanding

2. acute
   a. obtuse
   b. keen
   c. triangular
   d. pretty
   e. passionate

3. object
   a. confrontation
   b. mineral
   c. goal
   d. impartial
   e. disliked

4. dissimulation
   a. concealment
   b. disclosure
   c. supposition
   d. gesticulation
   e. derision

5. cunningly
   a. mischievously
   b. slippery
   c. secretly
   d. craftily
   e. confidentially

6. inquiring
   a. asking
   b. explaining
   c. appealing
   d. demanding
   e. soliciting

7. sagacity
   a. painfully
   b. herbal
   c. epic
   d. foolishness
   e. wisdom

8. profound
   a. sneaky
   b. optimistic
   c. mind-reader
   d. bored
   e. penetrating

9. hearkening
   a. ignoring
   b. singing
   c. scratching
   d. listening
   e. sleeping

10. suppositions
    a. conversations
    b. hypotheses
    c. suggestions
    d. vexations
    e. actualities
11. stalked
   a. inquired
   b. pursued
   c. attended
   d. filmed
   e. concealed

16. waned
   f. darkened
   g. ended
   h. complained
   i. moonlight
   j. began

12. mark
   a. mutilate
   b. paint
   c. discharge
   d. consider
   e. ignore

17. dismembered
   a. forgotten
   b. connected
   c. multiplied
   d. mutilated
   e. dreamed

13. unperceived
   a. discerned
   b. unknown
   c. observable
   d. immoral
   e. detected

18. wary
   a. aware
   b. old
   c. cautious
   d. quiet
   e. sober

14. suavity
   a. cleanliness
   b. audacity
   c. smoothness
   d. clarity
   e. charisma

19. audacity
   a. boldness
   b. excitement
   c. smoothness
   d. profoundness
   e. trepidation

15. concealment
   a. the act of revealing
   b. the act of withholding
   c. the act of giving
   d. the act of hiding
   e. the act of lying

20. manner
   a. appearance
   b. peculiarities
   c. behavior
   d. courtesy
   e. correctness
21. vehemently
   a. apathetically
   b. observably
   c. humbly
   d. emotionally
   e. viciously

22. gesticulations
   a. gestures
   b. words
   c. guesses
   d. dissimulations
   e. suppositions

23. raved
   a. partied wildly
   b. whispered softly
   c. considered carefully
   d. spoke deliriously
   e. criticized mildly

24. derision
   a. mockery
   b. division
   c. separation
   d. complimentary
   e. satire

25. proceeded
   a. bought
   b. began
   c. donated
   d. happened
   e. pre-calculated
Writing Activity

“The Tell-Tale Heart” is a chilling story of a senseless, random murder. The narrator insists throughout the story that he is perfectly sane. In a well-developed essay, agree or disagree with the narrator’s claim that he is not insane. Support that position with reasons and evidence from the text, including the excerpts provided below.

True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

If you still think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three plans from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye—not even his—could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all—ha! ha!

[The heartbeat] grew louder—louder—louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected!—they knew!—they were making a mockery of my horror!—this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no long! I felt that I must scream or die! And now—again!—hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!