

Edgar & Ellen



TOURIST TRAP



A Guide for Fiendishly Clever Teachers



TOURIST TRAP

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www.edgarandellen.com

This delightful book (appropriate for ages 8 to 12) features rotten behavior from a pair of mischievous twins. Even reluctant readers will find this breezy read engaging. The antics of Edgar & Ellen are so outlandish and impractical, readers will look forward to how their impossible plans crash around them. That's why this book is marvelous classroom material; an irresistible story can become a teachable one, too. We hope these guides make the lessons as unforgettable as the characters.

Plot Synopsis

Meddling Mayor Knightleigh plans to build a new hotel on the site of the twins' beloved junkyard. A busload of influential financiers and journalists is scheduled to come to town, and their reaction could very well cement the mayor's bid to draw a steady stream of tourists to Nod's Limbs. To save the junkyard and scuttle the hotel plans, Edgar and Ellen commandeer the tour, guiding visitors to bogus highlights like the quicksand lair of the Limbless Monster, the crabapple tree where escaped convicts congregate, and the Wax Museum's melted marvels. At the

grand French Toast Festival, Edgar caps the day by loosing the equivalent of 513,080 bottles of maple syrup on the assembled revelers—sticky sweet chaos, and surely enough to spell doom for the tourism initiative. The widely-read travel writer is driven to the brink—but in the book's final chapter, we see she may have passed the brink altogether: her published review of the day's lunacy makes Nod's Limbs sound like an ideal destination for an adventurous traveler. The hotel, it seems, will proceed as scheduled.

Vocabulary

acclaim
alabaster
battalion
brutish
carnivore
cavalcade
compel
contemporary
disembodied
docent
ebb

esteemed
etched
evade
famished
forage
gobbledygook
grievous
gullet
imminent
impermanence
imposing

incoherent
laden
lustrous
mull
obliged
ornate
perpetrator
prominent
proprietor
ramshackle
ravenous

refinement
rendering
scavenge
selfless
skittering
torrent
unabridged
unwieldy
world-renowned

Prediction Questions

1. How are the twins going to stop tourists from coming to town?
2. How will the tourists react?
3. What is the big surprise behind the fence?
4. Why does the Mayor want to build the hotel?
5. What kind of story will Alex Sai write about the town?

Discussion

1. How do the twins get their comeuppance in this book? Is it enough of a payback for their misdeeds?
2. One reason Edgar and Ellen try to ruin the tourists' experience is because they want to save Berenice. Are their actions justifiable? Are there other ways they could have gotten what they wanted?
3. Why does Alex Sai write an article praising Nod's Limbs?
4. How did the town react when they found out famous tourists were coming? Is this the way your town would react?
5. What three landmarks in your town would you recommend to visitors?

Major Themes



•**Being Creative:** Edgar and Ellen think of the least obvious solution to all their problems. Their ideas are complicated and utterly original.

•**Doing What's Right:** It may seem like the prank is successful, but the renowned journalist writes a glowing review of the town anyway—typical for an Edgar and Ellen scheme. The twins always seem to get their comeuppance in the end.

•**Loyalty:** Edgar and Ellen go through the trouble of leading the tour in order to save their beloved plant Berenice from bulldozers. They're also loyal to each other—even though they bicker.

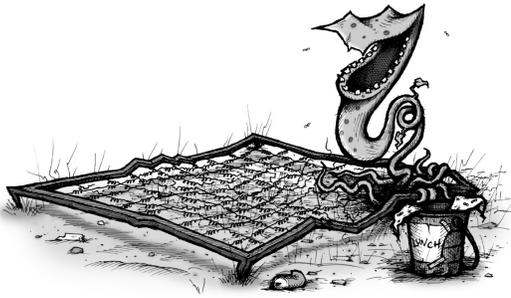
•**Community Pride:** The citizens of Nod's Limbs like to throw parades and decorate their houses for big occasions. They also yearn for their town to be recognized as a historic treasure. In what ways does your community show pride in itself and its citizens?

•**Humor:** The scheme behind this book—and the sticky finale—is clearly outrageous. Show children that although the book is mostly set in the “real world” (not fantasy or science fiction), the events are still comically beyond reality. Are the characters in this book believable? (Introduce the concept of caricature.)



One night when Ellen thought he was outside extinguishing fireflies, Edgar spoke to her through the intercom pretending that his rumbling, disembodied voice was that of a distant uncle who died of the plague.

LANGUAGE ARTS



The white-toothed plant Berenice takes her name from a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. In it, an obsessive recluse can't shake the image of his cousin's toothy smile; after her death, he exhumes her body and collects her teeth in a box, though he can't recall why. Read the abridged version of "Berenice" included in this guide. Take turns reading it aloud, and ask students to paraphrase sentences or whole paragraphs to gauge their comprehension.

Aside from being a truly creepy tale, the story introduces students to Poe's distinct, descriptive style. The story ends just as the narrator realizes the irrational act he has committed, so it lacks a true resolution. Have students finish the story. What happens to the narrator? Could Berenice still be alive? How does the house staff respond? (For an alternative activity, have students retell the story from the perspective of a servant.) Discuss Poe's style, syntax and word choice, and encourage them to match his tone as best they can.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Create a tour book for your town. Like most guides, it should include local history, as well as must-see landmarks, residents of note, and cultural events like festivals and fairs. Check out a few guidebooks from the library so students can mimic a real tour book's look and feel.
2. At one stop in their tour, Edgar and Ellen point out the Limbsless Monster, a phony urban legend of their own creation. Have each student select an urban legend, modern myth or folkloric tale to explore (anything from Bigfoot to ghostly Molly Malone of folksong fame). Ask them to be skeptical, and to probe the origins of the tale. Can they chronicle any sightings? Has anyone debunked the legend?

SCIENCE

Two architects with wild ideas visit Nod's Limbs in this book. Have your students try their hands at building their own structures with one of these activities:

1. House of Cards. Have each student bring in a worn deck of cards (or a batch of a parent's outdated business cards) from home. (Some businesses might be able to donate large numbers of business cards; ask around.) Begin with a traditional card structure: lean two cards together to make a tent, then build another tent beside it. Place a single card over the two tents to make the basic building block of card structures. (Students will come up with more methods of leaning the cards together and should be encouraged to deviate from this basic method.) How many pieces of paper will each structure hold before it collapses? For a more durable building block, fold one-quarter of the length from each end of the card - this will help the card stand better on its edge, and it also helps hold two cards together as a reinforced "two-ply" wall.
2. Toothpicks and Glue. (advanced activity) Build a structure using toothpicks held together by dollops of glue. Before beginning, students should sketch their ideas, then construct "building blocks" with their toothpicks that can be brought together to form the whole. For more information on more complex structures, see the marvelous project ideas (and a helpful TV series) from PBS:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/index.html>

MATH

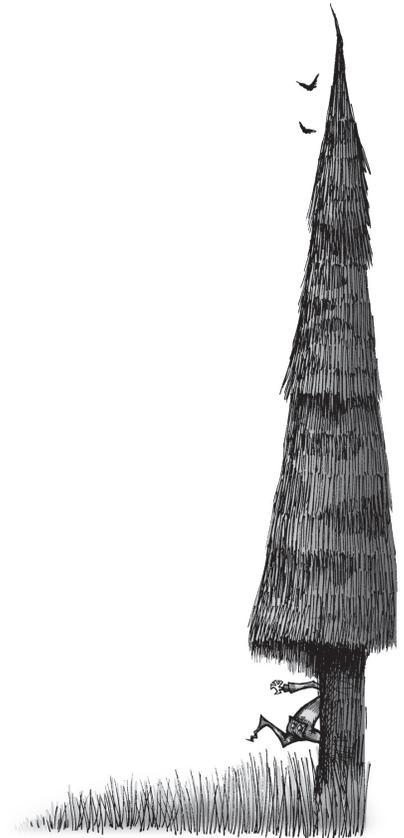
These word problems are each progressively more difficult for use with different grades and skill levels. The last two teach the concept of “distance=rate x time.”

1. According to the odometer, the Nod’s Limbs hotel shuttle drove 21 miles one day. It dropped off guests at the Clock Tower twice, and it made a side trip to the Wax Museum. (It always returned to the hotel after a drop-off.) The distance to the museum is 1.5 miles. How far is it to the Clock Tower?
2. The tourists depart the Clock Tower and reach City Hall in 30 minutes. The guidebook says the distance between the two places is 2.5 miles. How fast were they traveling?
3. FOR THE FIENDISHLY CLEVER: The tourists leave the hotel at 8:30, headed for their first destination. They are walking at 4 miles/hour. At 8:40, Stephanie begins chasing after them, running at 6 miles/hour. What time will she catch up to them (to the nearest minute)?

ANSWERS

1. $1.5 \text{ miles} \times 2 = 3 \text{ miles}$; that leaves 18 miles ($21 - 3 = 18$) for the 4 legs of the trip between Clock Tower and hotel.
 $18/4 = 4.5 \text{ miles}$
2. $2.5 \text{ miles} = r \times .5 \text{ hour}$
 $r = 2.5/.5$
 $r = 5 \text{ miles/hour}$
3. T is the time between 8:40 and the moment both groups meet. (Because the tourists leave 10 minutes earlier, their time is T+10.) D is the distance traveled, which is equal for both groups. R is the rate for the tourists: .067 miles/minute (for 4 miles/60 minutes). r is the rate for Stephanie: .1 mile/minute (for 6 miles/60 minutes)

$$\begin{aligned} D &= R(T + 10) \text{ and } D = rT \\ R(T + 10) &= rT \\ .067(T + 10) &= .1T \\ .067T + .67 &= .1T \\ .67T + 6.7 &= T \\ 6.7 &= .33T \\ T &= 20.3 \text{ minutes} \\ (8:40 + 20 \text{ minutes}) &= 9:00 \end{aligned}$$

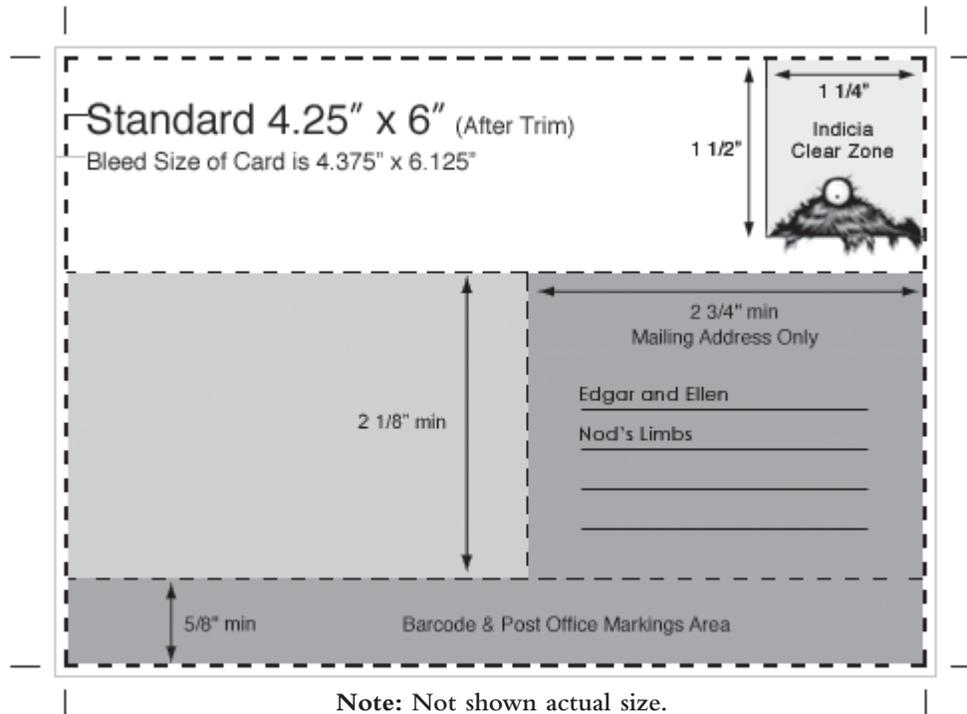


CAREER DAY

Have students research how to become an architect. What kind of training do they need? What kind of school subjects would be most helpful? What does an architect do all day, and what tools might she use?

ART

Create postcards visitors might send from your town. Have students draw pictures or take photographs of the most obvious landmarks as well as out-of-the-ordinary locations that **should** get more attention. Who can come up with the best headline for each image? Design the type for each headline, and use spray mount to affix card-stock backing to each postcard. Like every postcard, be sure to include a description of the cover image on the back. These U.S. Postal Service requirements will ensure your cards are fit for mailing (see image):



ONLINE ACTIVITIES

Edgar & Ellen are always happy to receive any poems, songs or short stories your class writes. (They also love to see reviews of their book and ideas for schemes to try next.) Because the Edgar & Ellen Web site will publish many submissions of fan writing, some of your students may see themselves published if the twins like what they see. Send your class's creations to us via mail (Edgar & Ellen, c/o Star Farm Productions, 1015 W. Lake Street #2W, Chicago, IL 60607), e-mail (submissions@edgarandellen.com), or visit edgarandellen.com to compose and submit stories through the site.

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Berenice

An abridged short story by Edgar Allan Poe

Berenice and I were cousins, and we grew up together in my **paternal halls**. Yet differently we grew—I ill of health, and buried in gloom—she agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy; hers the ramble on the hill-side—mine the studies of the **cloister**—I living within my own heart, and addicted body and soul to the most intense and painful meditation—she roaming carelessly through life with no thought of the shadows in her path, or the silent flight of the raven-winged hours. Berenice!—I call upon her name—Berenice!—and from the gray ruins of memory a thousand tumultuous recollections are startled at the sound! Ah! vividly is her image before me now, as in the early days of her light-heartedness and joy! Oh! gorgeous yet fantastic beauty!—Oh! **Naiad** among its fountains!—and then—then all is mystery and terror, and a tale which should not be told. Disease—a fatal disease—fell like the **simoom** upon her frame, and, even while I gazed upon her, the spirit of change swept, over her, **pervading** her mind, her habits, and her character, and, in a manner the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person! Alas! the destroyer came and went, and the victim—where was she, I knew her not—or knew her no longer as Berenice.

Among the numerous train of maladies **superinduced** by that fatal and primary one which effected a revolution of so horrible a kind in the moral and physical being of my cousin, may be mentioned as the most distressing and obstinate in its nature, a species of epilepsy not unfrequently terminating in trance itself—trance very nearly resembling positive **dissolution**, and from which her manner of recovery was in most instances, startlingly abrupt. In the meantime my own disease grew rapidly upon me, and assumed finally a **monomaniac** character of a novel and extraordinary form—hourly and momentarily gaining vigor—and at length obtaining over me the most incomprehensible **ascendancy**.

To muse for long unwearied hours with my attention riveted to some frivolous device on the margin, or in the topography of a book; to become absorbed for the better part of a summer's day, in a quaint shadow falling aslant upon the tapestry, or upon the door; to lose myself for an entire night in watching the steady flame of a lamp, or the embers of a fire; to dream away whole days over the perfume of a flower; to repeat monotonously some common word, until the sound, by **dint** of frequent repetition, ceased to convey any idea whatever to the mind; to lose all sense of motion or physical existence, by means of absolute bodily **quiescence** long and obstinately persevered in;—such were a few of the most common and least **pernicious vagaries** induced by a condition of the mental faculties.

In the **lucid** intervals of my infirmity, Berenice's calamity, indeed, gave me pain, and, taking deeply to heart that total wreck of her fair and gentle life, I did not fall to ponder frequently and bitterly upon the wonder-working means by which so strange a revolution had been so suddenly brought to pass. True to its own character, my disorder reveled in the less important but more startling changes wrought in the *physical* frame of Berenice—in the singular and most appalling distortion of her personal identity.

paternal halls: ancestral castle

simoom: dusty desert wind

monomania: obsession with one idea or subject

pernicious: destructive

cloister: monastery or nunnery

pervading: present throughout

ascendancy: rise

vagaries: erratic thoughts or actions

Naiad: a nymph of Greek mythology that presided over bodies of water

superinduced: caused

dint: effort

lucid: easily understood

dissolution: disintegration

quiescence: quiet restfulness

During the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her. In the strange **anomaly** of my existence, feelings with me, *had never been* of the heart, and my passions *always were* of the mind. Through the gray of the early morning—among the trellised shadows of the forest at noonday—and in the silence of my library at night, she had flitted by my eyes, and I had seen her—not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream—not as a being of the earth, earthy, but as the abstraction of such a being. And now—now I shuddered in her presence, and grew pale at her approach; yet bitterly lamenting her fallen and desolate condition, I called to mind that she had loved me long, and, in an evil moment, I spoke to her of marriage.

And at length the period of our nuptials was approaching, when, upon an afternoon in the winter of the year, I sat, (and sat, as I thought, alone,) in the inner apartment of the library. But uplifting my eyes I saw that Berenice stood before me.

Was it my own excited imagination—or the misty influence of the atmosphere—or the uncertain twilight of the chamber—or the gray draperies which fell around her figure—that caused in it so **vacillating** and indistinct an outline? I could not tell. She spoke no word, I—not for worlds could I have uttered a syllable. An icy chill ran through my frame; a sense of insufferable anxiety oppressed me; a consuming curiosity pervaded my soul; and sinking back upon the chair, I remained for some time breathless and motionless, with my eyes riveted upon her person. Alas! its **emaciation** was excessive, and not one **vestige** of the former being, lurked in any single line of the contour. My burning glances at length fell upon the face.

The forehead was high, and very pale, and singularly placid; and the once **jetty** hair fell partially over it, and overshadowed the hollow temples with innumerable ringlets now of a vivid yellow, and jarring discordantly, in their fantastic

character, with the reigning melancholy of the countenance. The eyes were lifeless, and lustreless, and seemingly pupilless, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips. They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, *the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view. Would to God that I had never beheld them, or that, having done so, I had died!

The shutting of a door disturbed me, and, looking up, I found that my cousin had departed from the chamber. But from the disordered chamber of my brain, had not, alas! departed, and would not be driven away, the white and ghastly *spectrum* of the teeth. I saw them *now* even more **unequivocally** than I beheld them *then*. The teeth!—the teeth!—they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me; long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them. Then came the full fury of my monomania, and I struggled in vain against its strange and irresistible influence. I had no thoughts but for the teeth. For these I longed with a frenzied desire. They—they alone were present to the mental eye, and they, in their sole individuality, became the essence of my mental life. I held them in every light. I dwelt upon their peculiarities. I pondered upon their conformation. I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason.

anomaly: departure from the normal

vacillating: wavering back and forth

emaciation: extreme thinness

vestige: faint remains

jetty: deep black

unequivocally: clearly

And the evening closed in upon me thus—and then the darkness came, and **tarried**, and went—and the day again dawned—and the mists of a second night were now gathering around—and still I sat motionless in that solitary room; and still I sat buried in meditation, and still the phantasma of the teeth maintained its terrible ascendancy as, with the most vivid hideous distinctness, it floated about amid the changing lights and shadows of the chamber. At length there broke in upon my dreams a cry as of horror and dismay; and thereunto, after a pause, succeeded the sound of troubled voices, intermingled with many low moanings of sorrow, or of pain. I arose from my seat and, throwing open one of the doors of the library, saw standing out in the antechamber a servant maiden, all in tears, who told me that Berenice was—no more. She had been seized with epilepsy in the early morning, and now, at the closing in of the night, the grave was ready for its tenant, and all the preparations for the burial were completed.

I found myself sitting in the library, and again sitting there alone. It seemed that I had newly awakened from a confused and exciting dream. I knew that it was now midnight, and I was well aware that since the setting of the sun, Berenice had been interred. But of that dreary period which intervened I had no positive, at least no definite comprehension. Yet its memory was replete with horror—horror more horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible from ambiguity. It was a fearful page in the record my existence, written all over with dim, and hideous, and unintelligible recollections. I strived to decipher them, but in vain; while ever and **anon**, like the spirit of a departed sound, the shrill and piercing shriek of a female voice seemed to be ringing in my ears. I had done a deed—what was it? I asked myself the question aloud, and the whispering echoes of the chamber answered me, “what was it?”

On the table beside me burned a lamp, and near it lay a little box. It was of no remarkable character, and I had seen it frequently before, for it was the property of the family physician; but how came it there, upon my table, and why did I shudder in regarding it? Why did the hairs of my head erect themselves on end, and the blood of my body become congealed within my veins?

There came a light tap at the library door, and pale as the tenant of a tomb, a **menial** entered upon tiptoe. His looks were wild with terror, and he spoke to me in a voice **tremulous**, husky, and very low. What said he?—some broken sentences I heard. He told of a wild cry disturbing the silence of the night—of the gathering together of the household—of a search in the direction of the sound; and then his tones grew thrillingly distinct as he whispered me of a violated grave—of a disfigured body enshrouded, yet still breathing—still palpitating—*still alive!*

He pointed to garments; they were muddy and clotted with gore. I spoke not, and he took me gently by the hand: it was indented with the impress of human nails. He directed my attention to some object against the wall. I looked at it for some minutes: it was a **spade**. With a shriek I bounded to the table, and grasped the box that lay upon it. But I could not force it open; and in my tremor it slipped from my hands, and fell heavily, and burst into pieces; and from it, with a rattling sound, there rolled out some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor.

tarried: remained shortly

anon: at once

menial: low

tremulous: trembling

spade: shovel