

7th Grade Humanities: “The Tell-Tale Heart” Persuasive Writing: Sane or Insane?

Throughout Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the reader is left to wonder whether or not the narrator is sane when he commits the murder of the old man. While there is no question that the narrator committed the act, in a modern courtroom, there is a possibility that he might not be found guilty of murder.

Based on what you have read, learned from other classmates, and the evidence you compiled from “The Tell-Tale Heart,” **write a persuasive essay that states and defends whether the narrator is sane (and therefore guilty of murder) or insane (and therefore not guilty by insanity).**

WRITING PROMPT: Persuade **JEN, JURY, & JUDGE** whether the narrator is guilty of murder because he is sane, or not guilty by reason of insanity.

GUIDELINES:

You must include each of the following in your response:

- Text-based evidence from “The Tell-Tale Heart”
- State the author and title of the short story in your use in your response
- State your position clearly-- convince!
- Thesis statement must be in the first paragraph
- You could mention/acknowledge the other side of this topic (optional)
- Create flow of ideas using effective transitions
- Establish and maintain a formal style
- Conclusion - sum up your thoughts
- Word Choice: No personal pronouns (NONE!)
- Genre: Persuasive Essay- write to convince
- Length: 2 pages minimum (a front and a back); at least 4 paragraphs
 - *Paragraph 1*- introduction/thesis
 - *Body Paragraphs*-(at least two are required...if you need more, then use more)
 - Each body paragraph should be about a different reason/aspect to support your thesis.)
- *Conclusion*- Wrap it up. Final statements, reflection, etc.
- Style: Don’t write to impress, but write in your own voice
- Formatting: double spaced, Times New Roman, MLA Heading, Title, quotes must be cited with author/page number)
- Due: Monday, June 3 (Jen’s birthday)-- must be attached to Jupiter.

TIME TO DECIDE YOUR STANCE...TURN OVER THE PAPER!

OPTION 1: PERSUADE JEN, JURY, & JUDGE THAT THE NARRATOR IS SANE.

- You are the *PROSECUTING attorney (lawyer)* for the state in a case against a man accused of murder. The man is obviously guilty—he confessed to the crime and led the police straight to the body of his victim.
- The defense lawyers are going to try to prove that their client is insane and should therefore get a lesser sentence. But you want to prove that he is not insane so the murderer will face the full consequences of his crime.
- Use the information from your reading, Mad vs. Sane notes, Poe’s two versions of the story, text evidence, and class discussions to prove that the murderer is NOT insane.
- REMEMBER: Legal sanity means that, at the time of the crime, the killer...
 - Could distinguish fantasy from reality
 - Could tell right from wrong
 - And could control his behavior

OPTION 2: PERSUADE JEN, JURY, & JUDGE THAT THE NARRATOR IS INSANE.

- You are the court-appointed *DEFENSE attorney (lawyer)* for a man accused of murder. The man is clearly guilty—he confessed to the crime and led the police straight to the body of his victim.
- Obviously, there is no chance of getting a jury to find him innocent.
- However, if you can convince the jury that your client is insane, he’ll be able to avoid the death penalty and might be sent to an institution instead of to prison.
- Use the information from your reading, Mad vs. Sane notes, Poe’s two versions of the story, text evidence, and class discussions to prove that the murderer IS insane.
- REMEMBER: Legal insanity means that, at the time of the crime, the killer...
 - Could not distinguish fantasy from reality
 - Could not tell right from wrong
 - And could not control his behavior

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

<p>In a criminal trial, the word “insanity” means something more specific than when we use it in everyday speech. You can’t say that someone on trial is “insane” just because he did something that most of us would consider “crazy” (like killing someone, chopping up the body, and hiding the pieces under the floorboards.) That’s because, in a trial, when we say someone is insane, we’re saying that the person didn’t fully understand what he or she was doing and therefore shouldn’t be held responsible for his or her actions.</p>	<p>Read the following legal definition of insanity:</p> <p>Insanity is a mental illness of such a severe nature that a person cannot distinguish fantasy from reality, cannot manage his/her own affairs, or is subject to uncontrollable impulsive behavior. In criminal cases, a plea of "not guilty by reason of insanity" will require a trial on the issue of the defendant's insanity (or sanity) at the time the crime was committed.</p>	<p>In this context, "not guilty" does not mean the person did not commit the criminal act for which he or she is charged. It means that when the person committed the crime, he or she could not tell right from wrong or could not control his or her behavior.</p>
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