

The House of Usher

by Edgar Allan Poe *from The Fall of the House of Usher*

This passage is from the opening of The Fall of the House of Usher. The narrator has just arrived at the home of his childhood friend Roderick Usher. It is a description of Usher's house. A tarn is a mountain lake.

Shaking off from my spirit what must have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. aspect
2. antiquity
3. minute
4. dilapidation
5. specious
6. scrutinizing
7. perceptible
8. sullen

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "I scanned more narrowly the real **aspect** of the building"

- a. entrance; gate b. characteristic; appearance c. scenery or setting d. windows

2) "Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive **antiquity**."

- a. age or ancientness b. poor quality; inferiority c. value d. dampness or humidity

3) "**Minute** fungi overspread the whole exterior"

- a. dark green b. tiny; very small c. deadly; dangerous d. 60 seconds

4) "this was apart from any extraordinary **dilapidation**"

- a. evaluation or judgment b. beauty or grace c. ruin; disrepair d. restoration; care

5) "reminded me of the **specious** totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years"

- a. special; unique b. large quantity c. complex d. deceptively attractive or appealing

6) "Perhaps the eye of a **scrutinizing** observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure"

- a. investigating; examining b. unkind or hateful c. professional d. casual or uninterested

7) “Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely **perceptible** fissure”

- a. understandable b. treatable or fixable c. noticeable; obvious d. believable

8) it became lost in the **sullen** waters

- a. foamy or spraying b. gloomy or glum c. dirty; polluted d. deep