

The Tell-Tale Heart

Edgar Allan Poe

What does the narrator accidentally prove?

TOTAL TIME

PASSAGE

30 minutes	The narrator argues for his sanity
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FIND THE ANCHOR TEXT

Use the Anchor Text Table of Contents in the Enhanced Reader to open the START anchor. Then use the dropdown to select the END anchor.

SECTION / LOCATION	Short story - opening paragraphs before the murder
START	TRUE!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous
END	I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.
PASSAGE ID	sec-03-the-tell-tale-heart

THE MOVE

Test a narrator's evidence against his claim

WHY THIS PASSAGE

The narrator offers planning, patience, heightened senses, and careful concealment as evidence of sanity. Those same details reveal obsession, violence, and distorted perception. The lesson works because his evidence undermines the claim it is meant to prove.

MARK

Box each piece of evidence the narrator gives for being sane. Beside it, write what the same detail could prove instead. Star the example where the narrator seems most confident and least convincing.

NOTICE

- What standard of sanity does the narrator appear to be using?
- Which piece of 'proof' most strongly supports the opposite conclusion?

- Why does detailed planning fail to prove that the narrator's judgment is sound?

THINK

Answer provisionally: What does the narrator accidentally prove? Choose the strongest interpretation you can defend from this passage alone.

WRITE

Write a short evidence-based response to: What does the narrator accidentally prove? Use at least two details from the assigned passage and explain how they support your interpretation.

CLOSE

Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and explain why.

STRONG ANSWER	The narrator tries to prove sanity by pointing to patience, planning, precision, and heightened perception, but those same details reveal obsession and distorted judgment. His evidence proves control over a murder plan, not soundness of mind.
EVIDENCE	Use his repeated insistence on careful nightly watching, the narrow ray of light, the fixation on the eye, and the pride he takes in methodical behavior. The best answers show how the same detail can support his claim and undermine it.
WATCH FOR	Do not argue that careful planning automatically equals sanity. The question is about the mismatch between the narrator's standard of proof and what the evidence actually shows.
SOLO	Read the exact passage independently.
SUPPORTED	Use narration and sentence highlighting while reading the same passage.
LISTENING	Listen to the exact passage; visual following is optional. Same question and evidence demand.

STUDENT PAGE · SAME PASSAGE, SAME THINKING

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What does the narrator accidentally prove?

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END ANCHOR	I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

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OPEN THE MARKED PASSAGE IN TUMBLELIT

SOLO: read independently. SUPPORTED: use narration + highlighting. LISTENING: listen to the exact passage. The question and evidence task stay the same.

1. MARK - Box each piece of evidence the narrator gives for being sane. Beside it, write what the same detail could prove instead.

Star the example where the narrator seems most confident and least convincing.

2. NOTICE - What standard of sanity does the narrator appear to be using? Which piece of 'proof' most strongly supports the opposite conclusion? Why does detailed planning fail to prove that the narrator's judgment is sound?
3. THINK - Answer provisionally: What does the narrator accidentally prove?
4. WRITE - Write a short response using at least two pieces of evidence from this passage.

Use evidence from the assigned passage. Show what you noticed and how the text supports your interpretation.