

The Mask of the Red Death



A terrible disease called the Red Death has struck the country. It is incredibly fatal, horribly **gruesome**, and it has already killed off half the kingdom. But the ruler of these parts, Prince Prospero, does not seem to care about his poor, dying **subjects**. Instead, he decides to let the kingdom take care of itself while he and a thousand of his favourite knights and ladies shut themselves up in a fabulous castle to have one never-ending party. Wine, women, music, dancing, fools—Prospero's castle has it all. After the last **guest** enters, no one else can get in—the Prince has welded the doors shut. That means no one can get out, either...

About five or six months into his stay, Prospero decides to have a spectacular **masquerade** ball (a ball where the guests wear masks and costumes). The

setup is **weird and wild**, just like the Prince who designs it. The ball takes place in a suite of seven rooms, each one dressed up in a different color: blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet, and black. The black room, which looks like death, is awfully **creepy**—it is got dark black walls, blood red windows, and big black clock which chimes so eerily every hour that everybody at the party stops dancing and laughs nervously. Most of the **frolicking** masqueraders are too weirded out to go into the black room.

Anyway, the party's **in full swing** and everybody is having a wild time when the clock strikes midnight. Everyone stops dancing and falls momentarily silent, as usual. Then some of the dancers notice a guest no one had seen before, wearing a scandalous costume. Whoever the new guest is, he's decided to dress as **a corpse**, a corpse who died of... the Red Death. He's so frighteningly lifelike (deathlike?) he **freaks everybody out**, and he slowly starts "stalking" through the frightened crowd. When Prince Prospero sees the ghostly guest, he's furious that someone would have the nerve to wear such a costume and orders him to be **seized** and unmasked. But no one has the guts to do it, including Prospero himself.



The Red Death masquerader passes within a few feet of the Prince and starts to walk through the rooms, **heading** toward the black room. Prospero loses it and runs after him in a **rage**, drawing his dagger as he approaches. But just as Prospero reaches the edge of the black room, the corpselike guest suddenly whirls around to face him, and Prospero falls to the ground, dead. The shocked crowd throws itself at the guest, only to discover in horror that there is nothing underneath the mask and costume. The Red Death itself has come to the party. One by one the guests die, spilling their blood all over Prospero's **lavish** rooms. The candles go out, leaving only "darkness, **decay**, and the Red Death."

1/ VOCABULARY

WRITE THE WORDS IN YELLOW AND LOOK UP THEIR MEANING IN THE DICTIONARY.

1	gruesome	extremely unpleasant and shocking, and usually dealing with death or injury
2	subjects	a person, thing, or situation that is written about in a book, article, etc. or shown in a picture, etc
3	guest	a person who is staying with you, or a person you have invited to a social occasion, such as a party or a meal
4	masquerade	a party or dance where people wear masks
5	weird and wild	different, extravagant
6	creepy	strange or unnatural and making you feel frightened
7	frolicking	to play and behave in a happy way
8	in full swing	to be exciting and enjoyable
9	a corpse	a dead body, usually of a person
10	freaks everybody out	to become or cause someone to become extremely emotional
11	seized	to take something quickly and keep or hold it
12	heading	going somewhere
13	rage	(a period of) extreme or violent anger
14	lavish	sumptuously rich, elaborate, or luxurious
15	decay	to become gradually damaged, worse, or less; to cause something to do this

2/ THE STORY

- **PROSPERO MAKES A HUGE MISTAKE. WHICH ONE?**

Prospero, like many men, thinks he can avoid death or at least put it off.

- **WHY IS A CLOCK SO IMPORTANT IN THIS STORY?**

Symbolically represents mortality and the inevitability of death. The clock's location and color associate it with death and the swinging pendulum represents the passage of time.

- **WHICH MORAL CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE STORY?**

The masque of the death has the intended to depict allegorically people's attempts to avoid facing the terrible fact that death will claim all of them and take away everything they own and everything they love.