

“The Black Cat” Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the significance: “There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of man.”
2. How does the description of the cat as “sagacious” contribute to the meaning of the story?
3. What is the significance of the cat’s name, Pluto?
4. What is the significance of the narrator’s change of disposition from docile and tender to “...more moody, more irritable and regardless of the feelings of others”?
5. Why did the narrator initially restrain himself from maltreating the cat while maltreating the other animals?
6. Why does he eventually mistreat the cat?
7. Describe the narrator’s feelings after abusing the cat? Why is that significant?
8. How does the narrator define “perverseness”? Do you agree with his definition? Do you agree that it is human nature?
9. Significance: “[I] hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and *because* I felt it had given me no reason of offence; *because* I knew that in doing so I was committing a sin.”
10. Discuss the significance of the fire. How does the narrator explain the phenomenon he discovers after the fire? What does the phenomenon symbolize?
11. What is significant about the new cat and his markings? What does the cat symbolize?
12. Discuss: “And now was I indeed wretched beyond the wretchedness of mere Humanity. And a *brute beast* to work out for *me* — whose fellow I had contemptuously destroyed — a *brute beast* to work out for *me* — for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God — so much of insufferable woe!”
13. Why is it significant that this cat will not leave the narrator alone?
14. How does the fact that the narrator kills his wife instead of the cat add to the meaning of the story?
15. What is significant about the narrator’s method in disposing of the body?

OVER PLEASE

16. Discuss the significance, “I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole thing up as before, so that no *eye* could detect anything suspicious.”
17. Why is the narrator able to sleep well after he conceals the body?
18. Significance: “Once again I breathed as a free man.”
19. Why does the narrator feel triumphant when the police arrive?
20. Discuss the syntax and punctuation in the following: “No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb! — by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman — a howl — a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation!”
21. How do you explain the ending? Discuss the symbolism.