

“The Tell-Tale Heart” Argumentative Prompt: Legally 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 or learned from other classmates in the evidence you compiled from “The Tell-Tale Heart,” create an opening argument that states and defends whether the narrator is sane (and therefore guilty of premeditated murder) or insane (and therefore not guilty by insanity).

PROMPT: Argue whether the narrator is guilty of premeditated murder, or not guilty by reason of insanity.

OPTION 1: 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 guilty of premeditated murder, so the murderer will face the full consequences of his crime. Use the information from your Character Motivation writing assignment to find evidence that you could use to prove that the murder was premeditated.

REMEMBER: Premeditated murder is a killing that has been willful, deliberate and premeditated, and carries the highest penalty.

OPTION 2: 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 Character Motivation writing assignment to find evidence that you could use to prove that the murderer is insane.

REMEMBER: Psychopathic or sociopathic personality disorders are marked by antisocial and impulsive behavior, disregard for societal standards, with no indications of fear or guilt, and often wear a mask of sanity. Meaning, a person could not distinguish fantasy from reality, could not tell right from wrong, and could not control his behavior.

You must include each of the following in your response:

- Text-based evidence from “The Tell-Tale Heart” (W.8.1.b)
- Text-based evidence from the definitions(W.8.1.b)
- State the author and title of all sources you use in your response (W.8.1.b)
- State your position (W.8.1.a)
- Acknowledge the other side of this topic (W.8.1.a)
- Create flow of ideas using effective transitions (W.8.1.c)
- Establish and maintain a formal style (W.8.1.d)
- Conclusion (W.8.1.e)

- 1) Introductory statement
 - a) Present a summary of the relationship between the characters
 - b) Describe the crime scene using vivid words, active verbs
 - c) Describe the state of the narrator (murderer)
 - d) Create a **claim** using the definition of your defense
- 2) Mini claim 1:
 - a) Use evidence from “confession”
 - b) Use evidence from “confession”
 - c) Use evidence from “confession”
 - d) Use evidence from “confession”
 - i) Analyze how this evidence backs up the mini claim
 - e) Restate claim in relation to mini claim
- 3) Mini claim 2:
 - a) Use evidence from “confession”
 - b) Use evidence from “confession”
 - c) Use evidence from “confession”
 - d) Use evidence from “confession”
 - i) Analyze how this evidence backs up the mini claim
 - e) Restate claim in relation to mini claim
- 4) Counter-claim: Here, acknowledge the other possible claim (the opposing side)
 - a) Use evidence to show why it can't be true (refute the counter claim)
 - b) Use evidence to show why it can't be true (refute the counter claim)
 - c) Analyze the opposite (present another mini claim)
 - d) Restate claim in relation to mini claim
- 5) Conclusion
 - a) Remind jury of victim
 - b) Connect the narrator's personality to crime
 - c) Use vivid words to convince jury of your major claim

Introduction:

1) _

a) _

b) _

c) _

d) _

2)

a)

b)

c)