Character Analysis

Name: _____

Date: _____

Active characters move the story along by consciously and deliberately making changes to their surroundings. Passive characters do the opposite: they are simply affected by the changes going on around them. Some characters are active in some ways and passive in others, or change from one to the other as the story progresses.

1. Fill in the table for each character. Tick **Active**, **Passive** or both, and give evidence from the story.



THE NARRATOR

☐ Active

☐ Passive

Relationship to other characters

Physical description

Personality

Evidence from the story



M. VALDEMAR

☐ Active

☐ Passive

Relationship to other characters

Physical description

Personality

Evidence from the story

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Matching exercise

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Match each phrase from the story with an image. Draw a line to join them.

1 *His face wore a leaden hue; the eyes were utterly lustreless; and the emaciation was so extreme, that the skin had been broken through by the cheekbones.*

2 *While he spoke thus, I commenced the passes which I had already found most effectual in subduing him*

3 *so hideous beyond conception was the appearance of M. Valdemar at this moment, that there was a general shrinking back from the region of the bed.*

4 *He now said: "Yes; -no; - I have been sleeping – and now – now – I am dead!"*

A 

B 

C 

D 

Glossary

Name: _____

Date: _____

Mesmerism: (n) hypnotism

Hitherto: (adv) until now

In articulo mortis: (adj/adv) at the moment of death

Spareness: (n) thinness

Clairvoyance: (n) being able to perceive things beyond the material world

Phthisis: (n) pulmonary tuberculosis

Dissolution: (n) death

Epoch: (n) a particular period of time

Expectoration: (n) coughing up phlegm

Osseous: (adj) made of bone

Cartilaginous: (adj) made of cartilage

Purulent: (adj) consisting of or discharging pus

Tubercles: (n) areas of swelling in the lungs, typical of tuberculosis

Aneurism: (n) excessive localised swelling of the wall of an artery

Aorta: (n) the main artery of the body

Stertorous: (adj) noisy and laboured

Supervene: (v) occur as an interruption to the current situation

Cadaverous: (adj) very pale, like a corpse

Hectic: (adj) affected by a fever typical of tuberculosis

Epithet: (n) an adjective or phrase expressing something characteristic

Volition: (n) the use of one's own will

Ichor: (n) a watery discharge from a wound

Abeyance: (n) a state of temporary suspension

Putrescence: (n) decayed matter

BEFORE YOU READ

If science could keep a person between life and death, should it? Who should decide?

Why do stories about the border between life and death frighten us so much?

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Quiz

Name: _____

Date: _____

Please choose the best option for each of the following questions.

1. What subject does the narrator say his attention has repeatedly been drawn to for the last three years?

(a) Magic tricks
(b) Embalming
(c) Mesmerism
(d) Exhumation

2. What is M. Ernest Valdemar well known for compiling?

(a) The "Bibliotecha Forensica"
(b) "A History of Hypnotism"
(c) "In Articulo Mortis: a study"
(d) "The Condition of the Working Class"

3. Under which pen name did Valdemar write "Wallenstein" and "Gargantua"?

(a) Angelina Klaus
(b) John Smith
(c) Kristof Engels
(d) Issachar Marx

4. What did Valdemar's physicians declare about him?

(a) That he was of a nervous disposition
(b) That he had phthisis
(c) That he was unsuited to be a subject of mesmerism
(d) That he was well-rounded and healthy

5. What is the first line of the letter Valdemar sent the narrator seven months ago?

(a) "My days are numbered"
(b) "I have good news"
(c) "You may as well come now"
(d) "I have some new information for you"

6. When did Valdemar's physicians think he would die?

(a) Midnight on Sunday
(b) Two o'clock on Saturday
(c) Midday on Monday
(d) Late afternoon on Thursday

7. Why did the narrator wait until about eight the following night to commence the mesmerisation?

(a) Because the mesmerisation might have worn off before Valdemar's death otherwise
(b) Because he didn't think the nurses alone would be reliable enough witnesses
(c) Because he wanted to spend some time with Valdemar beforehand
(d) Because he was tired and wanted to have a nap

8. What happened at some minutes after ten o'clock?

(a) The narrator gave up on mesmerising Valdemar
(b) Valdemar died
(c) Doctors D— and F— called
(d) Mr L— stormed out

9. What do the physicians conclude when they evaluated Valdemar's condition at midnight?

(a) That he is in a perfect state of mesmeric trance
(b) That he is dead
(c) That his breathing is becoming stronger
(d) That he is a zombie

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Quiz

Name: _____

Date: _____

10. How do Valdemar's conditions change when the narrator asks him if he is asleep for the third time? Select all that apply.

- [a] His eyes rolled upwards
- [b] His eyes turned red
- [c] He screamed
- [d] He grabbed the narrator by the throat
- [e] His skin became extremely pale
- [f] His mouth opened
- [g] The fever spots on his cheeks disappeared

11. Apart from seeming to come from a vast distance away, what else characterised the voice that came from Valdemar's jaws, according to the narrator?

- (a) It felt to him as gelatinous things feel to the touch
- (b) It felt to him as a sharp point feels to the touch
- (c) It was accompanied by an acute pain in the heads of everyone present
- (d) It was very high-pitched

12. What happened to Mr L— after the voice came out of Valdemar's mouth, saying he was dead?

- (a) He ran out of the house screaming
- (b) He swooned
- (c) He shot himself in the head
- (d) He tried to stab Valdemar in the chest

13. How long was Valdemar kept in his mesmeric state?

- (a) Over a year
- (b) One full cycle of the moon
- (c) Nearly seven months
- (d) Five days

14. What accompanied the lowering of Valdemar's pupils as the narrator began his attempts to awaken him?

- (a) His arms jerked into a stiff, outstretched position
- (b) A foul-smelling discharge flowed out his eyes
- (c) He began to chant in a low voice
- (d) He began to bleed from his nose

15. What does Valdemar say when the narrator asks him to explain his feelings or wishes?

- (a) He says he feels calm
- (b) He asks him to put him to sleep or waken him as he is dead
- (c) He says he will have his revenge
- (d) He says he wants to live again

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Quiz

Name: _____

Date: _____

If you read it in the iClassics app

Answer these extra questions about what you discover as you read:

1. What is the headline of the New York Herald as the story begins?

2. What happens when the narrator asks Valdemar if he is asleep?

3. What can you see in the narrator's hands after he awakens Valdemar?

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Think like a detective

Name: _____

Date: _____

Answer in full sentences. Support your ideas with evidence from the text.

1. The narrator calls his account “the facts” and tries to sound like a scientist. How does this clinical tone make the events more or less believable? Can we trust him?

2. Valdemar agrees to the experiment and thanks the narrator, but at the end begs to be awakened. Who is responsible for what happens? Does Poe present the experiment as science or as arrogance?

3. Poe uses medical vocabulary and precise times and details. How do these details create fear in the reader, and what is the effect of the final image?

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Writing

Name: _____

Date: _____

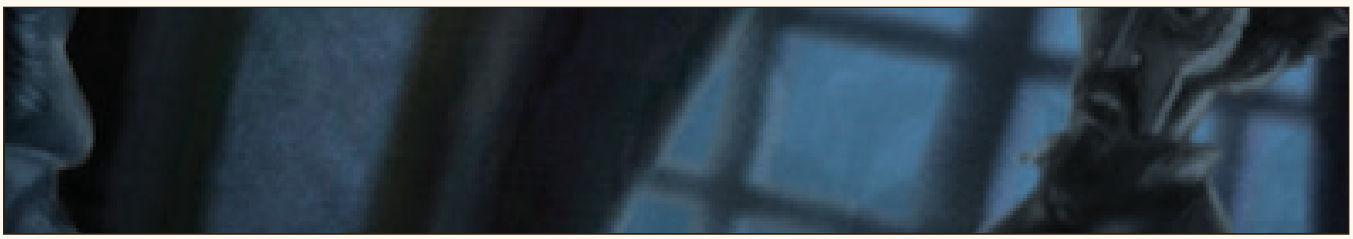
The New York Herald has sent a journalist round to interview the narrator of The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar about what happened to M. Valdemar. Imagine you are the narrator being interviewed. Answer the journalist's questions below.

1. You are a practising mesmerist, if I am not mistaken? Please can you explain to our readers what attracted you to this strange art?

2. And what was it that so attracted you to the idea of mesmerising someone on their deathbed?

3. You and M. Valdemar were close acquaintances. Can you explain to us why you chose him to be your subject for this experiment?

4. Accounts of what happened to M. Valdemar are very disturbing. Do you think what happened can be explained by science, or is this evidence of the supernatural? Give reasons to support your opinion.



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