Edgar Allan Poe's
“The Tell-Tale Heart”: Stages of Thinking

Directions: Answer the following questions using complete sentences, including correct capitalization and end punctuation. Put the page number in parentheses for each answer before the period.

Tips: To figure out these answers you have to do two things. First, find relevant clues/facts in the text. Second, make inferences from these clues/facts. Be an observant human being. The questions are in chronological order.

STAGE 1: FIND EXPLICIT INFORMATION

1. What does the word “mad” mean in the context of the first paragraph? What is the narrator trying to prove?

2. How exactly does the narrator feel about the man? Explain fully both—seemingly opposite—feelings.

3. Why is the narrator waiting to act on his “idea”? In other words, why doesn’t he carry out his idea as soon as he has it?

4. How does the old man die? How does the narrator know the old man is dead?

5. How does the narrator hide the body?

6. Why do the police arrive?

7. How does the narrator respond to them at first? Why does his attitude change?

8. What makes the narrator lose control at the end of the story?
STAGE 2: APPLY

9. **On the back of this sheet,** complete a plot diagram for “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Label each of the 5 elements by their technical name, and include at least two specific events for exposition and three for rising action. Short and specific phrases are best. If any plot elements are missing, use dotted lines (not solid) to indicate what we infer for these elements.
   Tip: Figure out the climax first. Use it as a touchstone to complete the rest of the diagram.

STAGE 3: INFER, ANALYZE, & SUMMARIZE

10. What can readers infer about what the narrator was doing before the story begins? What about when the story ends?

11. Read the quote and fill in the blanks in the sentence below: “I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart.”
   Poe shows that the narrator feels both _________________________________ and _________________________________ for the old man; however, the narrator also feels _________________________________ which we can infer from the word “chuckled.”
   Because of these ambiguous—or confusing—double feelings, we can infer that the narrator must be ____________ when he says he loves the old man.

12. Read the quote and answer the questions below: “All in vain, because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim.”
   A. Why did Poe purposefully capitalize Death?
   B. Who is Death’s victim?
   C. What does “stalked” mean, in your own words? In case you didn’t pick up on this: look up the actual denotation.
   D. Why did Poe purposefully choose that word? In other words, what connotative meaning are we readers supposed to pick up on?

13. Summarize the first paragraph in 1-2 complete and specific sentences.

14. Summarize the last paragraph in 1-2 complete and specific sentences.

15. **On the back of this sheet,** summarize the entire story into 1-2 complete sentences. You’re welcome to try this SWBST format: **Somebody** (character name) **Wanted to** (specific action(s)) **But** (something happened) **So** (this happened) **Then** (this happened as a final result).