“The Pit and the Pendulum” Reading Guide

Edgar Allan Poe set his story in the final years of the ______________________________, which was a period of time in which the Roman Catholic Church tried, imprisoned, tortured, and murdered ______________, or those who opposed the church.

What is suspense? ________________________________________________________________

(As you read, think about how Poe uses suspense in his story, as well as how he creates suspense.)

“The Pit and the Pendulum”
What is the point of view? __________________________________________________________

In the beginning of the story, readers immediately find out that the protagonist is sentenced to ____________________________________________________________________________.

Who are the “black-robed judges”? __________________________________________________

What is the significance that these judges are dressed in black? __________________________

Define “swoon.” _________________________________________________________________

On page ____, the narrator is losing himself into ____________________________________________________________________________.

When the narrator opens his eyes, where is he? __________________________________________

What does “autos-da-fe” mean? ____________________________________________________

Explain the “fearful idea [that] drove the blood in torrents upon [the narrator’s] heart.”
_______________________________________________________________________________

What makes the narrator decide against the above mode of death? _______________________

Why does that narrator tear the hem off of his robe? _________________________________
How big does he think his dungeon is? ________________________________________________________________________________

After the narrator trips, what does he find? ________________________________________________________________________________

How do the opening and closing of door create suspense? __________________________________________________________________________

Why does the narrator congratulate himself upon finding the pit? ______________________________________________________________________

What happens after the narrator drinks from the water pitcher? ______________________________________________________________________

The narrator notices that the general shape of his prison is a _________________________________________________________________________

What has changed about the narrator’s “personal condition”? ________________________________________________________________________

Define “surcingle.” ____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

The narrator’s torturers removed the water pitcher but left __________________________________________________________________________

What is painted on the ceiling? ____________________________________________________________________________________________________

What is special or different about this figure? ____________________________________________________________________________________

After the narrator noticed the swinging pendulum, he notices several enormous __________ coming out of the ________________.

The narrator notices that the pendulum is _______________________________________________________________________________________

What is on the pendulum’s “nether extremity”? __________________________________________________________________________________

What do you think this “nether extremity” is designed to do to the narrator? __________________________________________________________________

The pendulum makes a __________________ sound as it swings through the air.
Define “recusant.”

How long does the narrator think he lies on the table watching the pendulum get closer?

What are some of the emotions that the narrator feels as he watches the pendulum?

Explain the following quotation: “I was an imbecile – an idiot.”

Where was the pendulum design to hit the narrator?

Explain what the narrator realizes about his bandages and the pendulum blade.

What is the narrator’s plan to free himself?

The narrator is overcome by the realization that he is ___________ but still in the hands of the ________________.

After he escapes, what begins to happen to the room?

Where is the narrator being forced to?

Explain the conclusion of the story.

Where is the story set?

How did Poe create suspense in the story?

Did you like the ending?