

Edgar Allan Poe

## STORIES OF MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

In this reader you'll find nine of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous stories of mystery and suspense. They cover Gothic historical stories such as *The Pit and the Pendulum*, through to detective fiction like *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and an early science fiction story - *A Descent into the Maelström*. Ghostly mysteries such as *Ligeia* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* are also in the collection along with Poe's excellent study of madness *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

### In this reader you will find:

- Information about Edgar Allan Poe's life
- Focus On sections: Themes & Symbols, CLIL Meteorology, Great Detectives in Fiction
- Glossary of difficult words
- Comprehension and extension activities
- Final test
- B2 First style Activities in British English

### Tags

Classic literature    Mystery    Suspense

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Classic

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Edgar Allan Poe

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Edgar Allan Poe

## STORIES OF MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE



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# Book brief

- 1 A collection of nine of Poe's short stories.
- 2 The stories are set in different countries such as Spain and France.
- 3 Many of his stories contain elements of Gothic terror, while some explore the genre of science fiction.
- 4 Other stories are what nowadays we call 'detective stories' and the reader is introduced to C. Auguste Dupin who's better than the police at solving crimes.
- 5 Themes in this collection include the power of the dead over the living, madness, fear and death.

*Edgar Allan Poe*

# Stories of Mystery and Suspense

*Retold and Activities by*  
**Janet Borsbey and Ruth Swan**

*Illustrated by*  
**Simone Rea**

For Review Only

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## *Introduction to this Poe Collection*



### **The Tell-Tale Heart**

A classic Poe study of madness and the fear of death.



### **The Masque of the Red Death**

The story of Prince Prospero's efforts to escape the Red Death.



### **The Pit and the Pendulum**

Set in a prison in Toledo, towards the end of the Spanish Inquisition.



### The Premature Burial

A comic look at the fear of being buried alive.



### A Descent into the Maelström

The story of three brothers caught in a storm at sea.



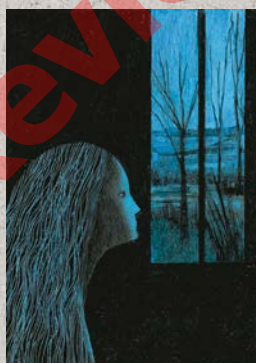
### The Murders in the Rue Morgue

One of the first ever detective stories. Poe introduces C. Auguste Dupin.



### The Stolen Letter

Another mystery solved by amateur detective, C. Auguste Dupin.



### Ligeia

A man remarries after the death of his much-loved first wife.



### The Fall of the House of Usher

The end of the Usher family and their home that belonged to the family for years and years.

## Before you Read

### Grammar B2 First

- 1 Read the introduction to this collection of short stories. Decide which answer (A, B, C or D) best fits each gap.

#### Edgar Allan Poe's Imagination

Edgar Allan Poe was one of America's greatest writers of short stories. This volume contains nine of his stories which were written between 1838 and 1845 and (1) ..... published in magazines. Poe wrote many different types of fiction. In this collection you'll find two of his detective stories – *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Stolen Letter* (originally called *The Purloined Letter*). The (2) ..... is considered one of the first detective stories, (3) ..... there are earlier examples in Chinese written works. Poe had a great influence on later writers (4) ..... as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. He was also interested in science fiction and *A Descent into the Maelström* is an (5) ..... of this type of writing. Poe is, however, probably most famous as a writer of dark short stories like *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the first story in this collection and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the (6) ..... Poe also wrote poetry, but this is less popular today (7) ..... it was in the past. Poe's career was tragically short, as he died at the age of 40.

- |                                       |                                     |                                      |                                       |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 A <input type="checkbox"/> mainly   | B <input type="checkbox"/> readily  | C <input type="checkbox"/> certainly | D <input type="checkbox"/> definitely |
| 2 A <input type="checkbox"/> better   | B <input type="checkbox"/> former   | C <input type="checkbox"/> after     | D <input type="checkbox"/> before     |
| 3 A <input type="checkbox"/> although | B <input type="checkbox"/> since    | C <input type="checkbox"/> then      | D <input type="checkbox"/> despite    |
| 4 A <input type="checkbox"/> like     | B <input type="checkbox"/> good     | C <input type="checkbox"/> much      | D <input type="checkbox"/> such       |
| 5 A <input type="checkbox"/> evidence | B <input type="checkbox"/> exercise | C <input type="checkbox"/> example   | D <input type="checkbox"/> entry      |
| 6 A <input type="checkbox"/> latest   | B <input type="checkbox"/> last     | C <input type="checkbox"/> latter    | D <input type="checkbox"/> late       |
| 7 A <input type="checkbox"/> compared | B <input type="checkbox"/> of       | C <input type="checkbox"/> that      | D <input type="checkbox"/> than       |





## Vocabulary

- 2 **Reporting Verbs.** Solve these anagrams to find verbs we can use to report speech. Then fill the gaps to complete the sentences with the Past Simple of the verbs.

|   |         |                                                              |
|---|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
|   | sak     | "How far exactly is it?" ..... <i>asked</i> ..... the child. |
| 1 | masrce  | "Help!" the old man .....                                    |
| 2 | lyper   | "Yes," she .....                                             |
| 3 | erwnas  | "Because it's time," the girl .....                          |
| 4 | miexcal | "You can't do that!" the police officer .....                |
| 5 | ryc     | "Ouch! That hurt!" he .....                                  |
| 6 | ousth   | "Look out!" they ..... "There's a car!"                      |
| 7 | eirwphs | "Shh! They'll hear us," the small boy .....                  |

- 3 **The first story is called *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Read this short introduction. Tick the words you expect to read in the text.**

*The Tell-Tale Heart* is really a study of madness. Tell-tale in the title means something which makes something else extremely obvious: e.g. chocolate around your mouth is a tell-tale sign that you've just eaten some. The story is told from the point of view of the narrator, who says that he has problems with his nerves, but is convinced that he's not mad. He tells the story of how he can't stop thinking about his elderly neighbor's eye, which he calls the Evil Eye. These dangerous thoughts make him want to kill the old man.

- |                                     |                                          |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> candle     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bird |
| <input type="checkbox"/> terror     | <input type="checkbox"/> pale            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> wise       | <input type="checkbox"/> free            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> possession | <input type="checkbox"/> anger           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> spider     | <input type="checkbox"/> gun             |

**Now read the story and check your answers.**



# The Tell-Tale Heart\*

- ▶ 2 It's TRUE! – I'm nervous – very, very nervous. I have *been* very nervous and I *am* very nervous. But why do you keep saying I'm mad?

The sickness had made my senses sharper; it hadn't destroyed them and it certainly hadn't dulled\* them. Above all, my sense of hearing was better than it'd ever been before. I heard everything in the heavens and on the earth. I heard things in hell. So, how could I be mad?

Listen. Listen to my story, you'll see how well, how healthily, I can tell it. I can tell you the whole story calmly, without even the smallest sign of madness.

I'm afraid I can't tell you how the idea first came into my brain, but as soon as it was there, it haunted me day and night. There was no reason for it. There was no anger in it. I loved the old man. He'd never done anything to hurt me. He'd never insulted me and I didn't want his money. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! One of his eyes was like a vulture's\* eye. It was a pale blue eye with a film\* over it. Whenever he looked at me with that vulture eye, my blood ran cold; and so – very gradually\* – I made up my mind\*. The old man was going to die and I'd be free of the eye forever.

Now, this is important. You think I'm mad. Madmen know

Here Poe presents the reader with the psychological mystery—that humans sometimes harm the people they love or need in their lives. Poe does this 50 years before Sigmund Freud gave great importance to this idea in his theories of the mind.

**the tell-tale heart** (here) the obvious/evident heart

**dull** make something less sharp

**vulture** a bird that eats dead bodies

**film** (here) something like a mist

**gradually** slowly, bit by bit

**make up (your) mind** decide

nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wise and careful I was. I worked so hard and I planned every detail. I was so kind to the old man the week before I killed him. I was kinder than I'd ever been to him before. And every night, about midnight, I opened his door very gently, oh so gently. And then, when I'd made a big enough opening, I put my head into the room, slowly. Oh, you'd have laughed to see how cleverly I put my head in through the door. I didn't want to disturb the old man's sleep, so, each night, it took me nearly an hour to put my head around the door. Would a madman be as wise as this?

My next move was to use my lantern\*. I'd covered it with black cloth so that no light at all was visible. Slowly now, I uncovered the cloth a very, very little. It was important to uncover it so that one small ray\* of light shone out. I shone the ray of light on the vulture eye. I did this for seven long nights – every night just around midnight – but I found that his eye was always closed. With his eye closed, it was impossible to do the job; I had no problem with the old man, my problem was the Evil Eye. And every morning, early, I went bravely into his room, called his name and asked whether he'd slept well. He never suspected that every night, just around twelve, I looked at him while he was sleeping.

On the eighth night, I was even more careful than usual when I opened the door. I felt wise, I felt stronger than I ever had before. To think that I was there, opening the door, little by little and he had no idea, he didn't even dream that I was there. I almost laughed at the idea and perhaps he heard me; he moved on the bed, suddenly. Did I stop? No, the room was dark, so I knew he couldn't see the door opening. I kept pushing it slowly, slowly.

lantern



ray a line of light from the sun or a light/lamp



Then I had my head inside the room. I was about to uncover the lantern in the usual way, when my thumb moved. A slight noise came from the lantern. It was slight, but the old man heard it. He sat up in bed and cried out, “Who’s there?”

I kept still and said nothing. For a whole hour, I didn’t move a muscle\*. I didn’t hear him lie down. So I knew that he was still there, sitting up, listening – just as I’ve done, night after night, listening to the mice in the wall.

Then I heard him groan\* and I knew that he was terrified. It was the low groan that comes from the bottom of the soul. Many a night, when the whole world has been asleep, I’ve groaned in exactly the same way, from fear, from terror. I knew what the old man was feeling and I was sorry for him, but I was happy in my heart. I knew that he’d been lying in bed, awake, since I’d made that very first noise. I knew also that his fears were growing. He’d been trying to imagine that there was no need to be afraid. He’d been saying to himself – “It’s only the wind in the chimney – it’s only a mouse in the walls,” or “What am I afraid of? It’s a small insect walking across the floor.”

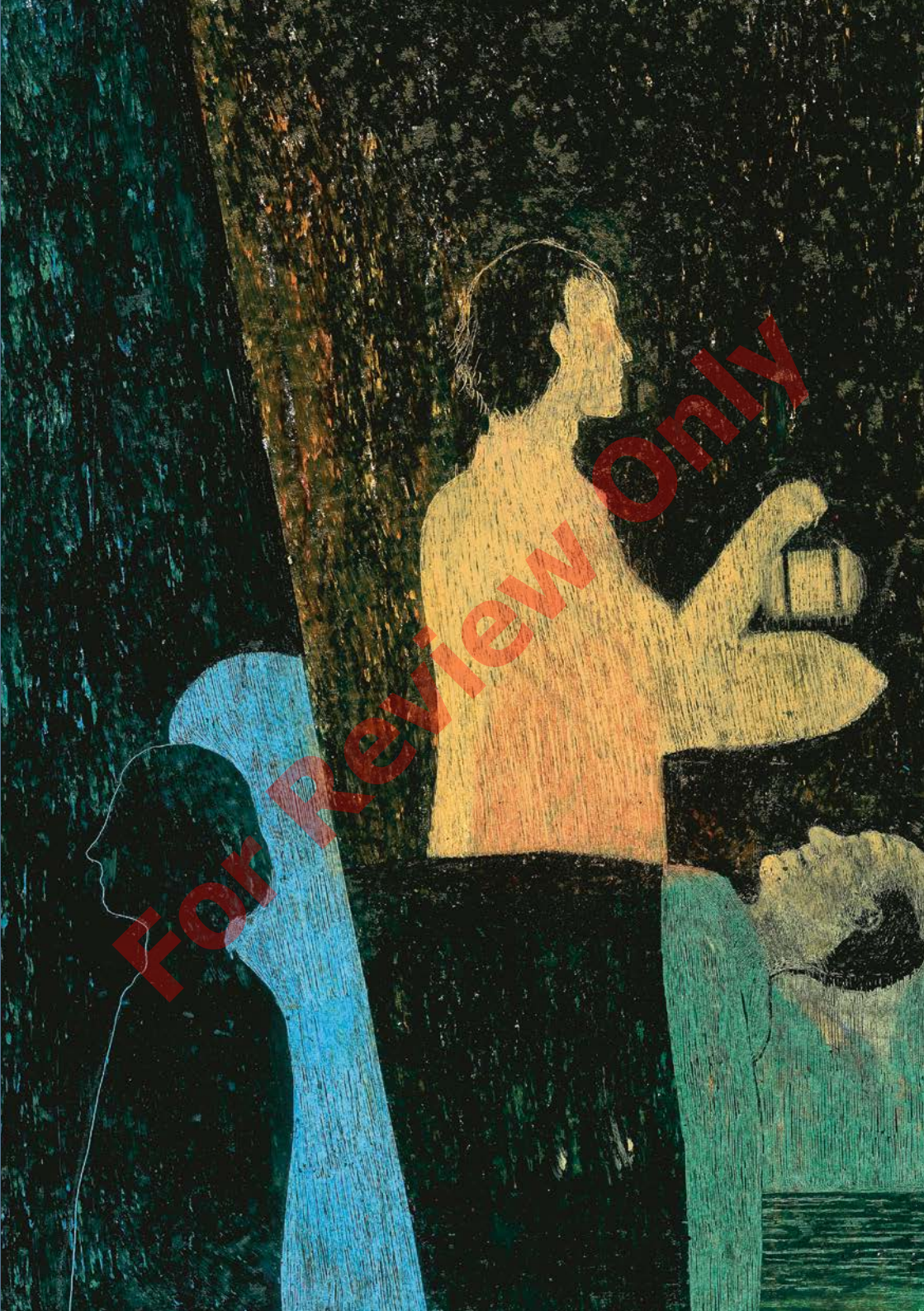
Yes, he’d been trying to comfort\* himself with these thoughts, but it was in vain\*. Of course, it was all in vain; because Death’s shadow was approaching him. Soon Death’s shadow would cover him completely and he’d be its victim\*. He knew this – he couldn’t see me, but he could feel that I was in the room.

When I’d waited a very long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I decided to open the lantern a little. I opened it slowly until a single ray, like a spider’s thread\*, shot out and landed on the vulture eye.

**I didn’t move a muscle** I stayed perfectly still  
**groan** make a low sound when you’re in pain  
**comfort** make (yourself or someone) feel better

**in vain** without any success  
**victim** someone harmed, injured or killed due to a crime, accident or event  
**a thread** (here) what a spider makes







## Edgar Allan Poe

It was open – wide, wide open – and I grew furious as I looked at it. I saw it perfectly clearly – a dull blue color with the horrible film. It chilled\* me to the bone. I could see nothing else of the old man's face or body, except that eye. I'd directed the ray of light precisely\*, by instinct\*, onto the damned spot\*.

As I explained to you before, you're making a mistake if you think I'm mad. The only problem that I have is the sharpness of my senses. This became very clear to me the next moment. I heard a low, dull, quick sound. It was the sound a watch makes if it's wrapped up in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It made me even more furious, just like the beating of a drum makes a soldier much braver.

Even now, I stayed still, hardly breathing. I held the lantern ray so that I could still see the eye. I held it steadily. The hellish beating of the heart grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! And still it grew louder, I say, still louder every moment!

I've told you that I'm nervous: so I am. And now, at this dead hour of night, in the silence of that old house, this strange noise filled me with uncontrollable terror. For a few minutes longer, I stood still. But the beating grew louder and louder! It was so loud that I thought his heart would burst. And now I had a new fear. What if a neighbor heard the sound of the old man's heart beating?

The old man's time had come! I shouted out and opened the lantern and ran into the room. He screamed once, only once. I pulled him onto the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled, happily. I'd done it! But for many minutes, the heart continued

**chill** to make something very cold  
**precisely** exactly  
**by instinct** without thinking about it

**damned spot** a quotation from  
Shakespeare's Macbeth

## Stories of Mystery and Suspense

beating, although the sound was fainter. Now it was too quiet for a neighbor to hear. Then, finally, it stopped. The old man was dead. I moved the bed and looked at the body. Yes, he was dead, stone dead\*. I put my hand on his heart and left it there for many minutes. It wasn't beating. He was definitely stone dead. His eye would never trouble\* me again.

If you still think I'm mad, you should listen to this. I was so wise when I hid the body. It was the middle of the night and I had to work fast before morning came. I worked quickly and silently. I cut the body into pieces. I cut off his head and his arms and his legs and I hid them under the boards in the floor. I was very careful. I replaced the boards very cleverly. No human eye would know that they'd been moved, not even the old man's. There was no blood anywhere, there was nothing to wash, no spot\* of blood, no stain of any kind, when I'd finished. I was so clever – I'd used the bath – ha! ha!

I looked at the time, it was four o'clock in the morning and it was still dark. Then I heard a knock at the street door. I went down to open it, with a happy heart – after all, I now had nothing at all to fear. There were three men at the door. They introduced themselves, politely. They said that they were police officers. They said that a scream had been heard in the middle of the night and that the neighbors were worried. They were afraid that a crime had been committed and so had called the police. The police officers said that they wanted to search the house.

I smiled – I had nothing to fear. I said that I'd screamed in my sleep – a bad dream. I said that the old man was away on a visit to the country. I took my visitors into every room in the house. I told them to

**stone dead** completely dead  
**trouble** worry, upset

**spot** (here) drop

search well. Then I took them to the old man's room. I showed them his things – his money was still there and all his treasures were still there, safe and secure. I was so confident! It was a perfect triumph\*! I brought chairs into the room and told them to sit down. I myself sat down; I put my chair over the place where the pieces of the old man's body were lying!

The officers were satisfied. I'd convinced them. I was very comfortable. They sat, and while I answered happily, they chatted about normal things. Soon, however, I felt pale and wished that they'd go. My head was aching and I began to feel a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still they chatted. The ringing became clearer. I talked more freely to forget the feeling, but it carried on, until I realized that the ringing wasn't actually in my ears.

No doubt I was now even paler. Still, I talked more fluently\*. I raised my voice, but the sound grew louder. What could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound. It was the sound a watch makes if it's wrapped up in cotton. I knew exactly what it was. I talked more quickly – more loudly; but the noise steadily increased\*.

I stood up and walked around. I talked loudly about nothing; but the noise steadily increased. Why wouldn't they go? I walked up and down the room with heavy steps, as if I were excited by the police officers' chatting – but the noise steadily increased.

Oh God! What could I do? I talked loudly – I shouted! I moved the chair so that it made a terrible noise across the floor, but the noise was louder than ever before and continually increased. It grew louder – louder – louder!

And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible?

**triumph** great success  
**fluently** easily, quickly

**increase** grow bigger, (here) get louder

## Stories of Mystery and Suspense

Couldn't they hear it? Almighty God! – no, no! They heard! – they suspected! They knew! – they were laughing at me, laughing at my horror.

This I thought and this I think now. But anything was better than the agony\* of this noise! Anything was better than the shame of them laughing at me! I could tolerate\* anything except this! I felt that I had to scream or die!

And now – again! – listen! louder! louder! louder! *louder!*

“Right!” I screamed. “That’s enough! I killed him! I admit it! I did it! He’s here under the boards in the floor! But stop that noise! Stop that terrible noise! Stop that beating of his terrible heart!”



**agony** terrible pain

**tolerate** put up with, stand



## After-Reading Activities

### Reading Comprehension

1 Are the statements true (T) or false (F)? Correct the false statements.

- |                                                                                                             | T                                   | F                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 The narrator is certain that he isn't mad.<br>.....                                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 The narrator had always had problems with the old man.<br>.....                                           | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Every night, about midnight, the narrator went to talk to the old man.<br>.....                           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 On the night of the murder, the old man was asleep when the narrator shone the light on his eye.<br>..... | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 The police officers came to the house, because the neighbors had heard screaming.<br>.....                | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 The narrator could hear the sound of the old man crying under the floor.<br>.....                         | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Word-building

2 A Complete the table using words from *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

| noun     | adjective |
|----------|-----------|
|          | sharp     |
| bravery  |           |
|          | furious   |
|          | careful   |
| wisdom   |           |
| evil     |           |
| dullness |           |
|          | clever    |

**2 B Complete these quotations from the story with adjectives from the box.**

- 1 "You should have seen how ..... and careful I was."
- 2 "I had no problem with the old man, my problem was the ..... Eye."
- 3 "On the eighth night, I was even more ..... than usual when I opened the door."
- 4 "It made me even more ....., just like the beating of a drum makes a soldier much braver."



## Grammar B2 First

**3 Use of English. Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given. You must use between two and five words, including the word given.**

- 1 I had never opened the lantern before.  
**first**  
It ..... I had ever opened the lantern.
- 2 You should have seen how wise and careful I was.  
**wish**  
I ..... how wise and careful I was.
- 3 "Did you sleep well?" I asked.  
**whether**  
I ..... well.
- 4 It took less time to clear up than I expected.  
**as**  
The clearing-up didn't ..... as I expected.
- 5 I advised the police officers to search the house well.  
**were**  
"If ..... search the house well."