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English 112B

Dr. Warner

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### Unit of Study: Gothic Literature

#### **Introduction to the Unit – “Why Teach Gothic Literature to Young Adults”**

The word “gothic” has a bad reputation in many aspects of culture. When it comes to gothic literature, however, the word “gothic” is somewhat empowering and carries with it well-known names such as Mary Shelley, Robert Louis Stevenson, Anne Rice, and Bram Stoker. Many underestimate the value of gothic literature because of the supernatural elements it often incorporates, but the genre has a lot to say about the issues that young adults have to deal with on a daily basis. Not only do the genre’s canonical works speak to young adults, but so also do the many works that are being written exclusively *for* young adults. Young adult gothic literature is rapidly growing in popularity and contains themes underneath the supernatural that are accessible to the wider young adult audience. Gothic literature makes reading fun, submersing young adults in a world different from – yet eerily similar to – their own. Young adults take a journey to this world and – possibly without knowing it – discover who they are along the way.

The rationale for teaching a unit on Gothic literature to young adults is that the Gothic genre has its roots in history. This, in addition to its current increasing popularity among teens, gives the Gothic genre a stronghold in the literary canon that students should be aware of as they proceed with their education. Much like young adult literature itself, some tend to shove Gothic literature aside saying that it is just for “Goths” or for those who are depressed. Teaching the

genre and the history behind it would dispense of those false generalizations and open up a world of great quality novels, short stories, and poems for the students.

### **Before the Unit – Introducing Gothic Elements**

Before beginning the unit, students would learn about the elements that go into Gothic literature. This would include a brief introduction to how the word “gothic” originated in architecture in the medieval times. Beginning with general Gothic plot elements, I would introduce the concepts of the ancestral curse, grave-robbing and body-snatching, dreaming and nightmares, supernatural props, gothic counterfeit, the grotesque, mystery, transformation, and superstition (Hughes). Most importantly I would emphasize the use of the supernatural in gothic literature above all these elements. It is also important to make students aware that while all these elements are gothic, they may not ALL appear in EVERY gothic work they study – there are bits and pieces of each element in each work, however. I would also highlight the archetypes for gothic characters: the devil, the doppelganger, ghosts, witches, vampires, werewolves, the pursued protagonist, the unreliable narrator, the villain-hero, the pursued heroine, and the revenant (Hughes). Then, I would also go into the typical settings found in Gothic literature such as the cemetery, or the castle or mansion, which is typically haunted or supernatural in some way. Without spending too much time on it, I want to also include a brief explanation of how the gothic genre originated out of early 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry known as Graveyard School poetry, which was primarily about death. Most of the impetus for early European Gothic literature came from the restrictions placed on European travel because of the French Revolution, which caused an increased taste for the exotic in the 1790s (Hughes 8). Gothic literature also became an outlet for the cultural tensions of the time, a tradition which translated through the centuries. All these

elements can be seen in the modern Gothic young adult literature, as most of it deals with contemporary teen issues while adding the Gothic elements of the supernatural.

### **Launching the Unit – Twilight Zone’s “The Howling Man”**

In order to launch the Gothic literature unit, I would show the Twilight Zone episode “The Howling Man” to the class as an example of Gothic elements and also of a central Gothic theme – the ambiguity of good and evil. This episode utilizes the classic gothic setting of a castle in Central Europe on a dark and stormy night. The story centers around a pursued protagonist character who comes to the castle for refuge from the storm. While wandering the castle, the man hears howling coming from somewhere in the depths of the castle and finds a man in captivity. The captured man (also the devil archetype as it turns out) persuades the protagonist to let him free. The protagonist finds that he has just let the devil loose upon the world and sets out to capture him again. When he finally does capture the devil – many years later – the protagonist’s maid subsequently lets the devil out again because she is persuaded to let him free as well. The moral is that the devil’s evil is ambiguous. He can appear ordinary, but he carries a great power and ability to manipulate. This episode of the Twilight Zone is excellent for portraying the themes of a Gothic unit of study. It is also a fun way to introduce the students to the elements of Gothic stories.

### **The Canonical Work – *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley**

My centerpiece or canonical work for the unit is Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* because it exemplifies the Gothic genre in many ways and also holds true to the theme of the ambiguity between good and evil. The Gothic elements in the story include the creation of the monster by Dr. Frankenstein and the subsequent actions of the monster itself. This all takes place in a somewhat contemporary Gothic setting in Geneva. *Frankenstein* has many of the other Gothic

elements as well – the most obvious being the supernatural creation of the monster. There is also the debatable archetype of the doppelganger, which appears in the form of Victor Frankenstein and his monster – with the monster being Victor’s darker half. Victor Frankenstein also plays the role of the ambiguous hero-villain. The essential question in the story becomes: is Dr. Frankenstein a well-meaning scientist or is he the cause of the destruction that the monster brings about? The dichotomy of this question carries throughout the story and makes for a very controversial discussion. At the end of reading this novel, the students will be able to choose whether to put Dr. Frankenstein on trial or the monster. They can put either one on trial for a number of reasons: playing God, desertion, cruelty, murder, or something that they choose. The trial must be based on quotes and evidence taken from the novel.

### **Extending the Unit**

This unit would then be extended through two additional canonical works (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Dracula*), a short story (“Rappaccini’s Daughter”), and four young adult gothic novels (*Another Jekyll*, *Another Hyde*; *Twilight*; *Beautiful Creatures*; and *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*). Pairing each of the additional canonical works with a young adult novel in its respective category would round out the activities for the unit.

The first work I would use to extend the Gothic literature unit would be the novella *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson. This novella presents a Gothic tale with many of the Gothic elements in *Frankenstein*, while also incorporating the doppelganger and ambiguity between good and evil that are also so thematic in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The students would use character sketches as an activity during reading to keep track of the differences between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

*Another Jekyll, Another Hyde* by Daniel and Dina Nayeri would be an excellent pairing with Stevenson's canonical work because it is a modern take on the story. The Nayeris' young adult novel mixes real life teen issues with the paranormal fantasy of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde to create a world that is accessible to young adults. *Another Jekyll, Another Hyde* chronicles the story of Thomas, who abuses drugs and falls a little too far into the drug scene. When he blacks out one night, he realizes that his drug use has gone too far. Students will be able to compare and contrast the Nayeris' and Stevenson's novels based on the likeness (and differences) of their stories and their Gothic elements. They will also be able to see how a canonical work can be transformed into a young adult novel that is modernized for teens.

Additionally, students will be able to do much the same for the pairing of the canonical work *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and the young adult Gothic novel *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer. This pairing is based in the vampire Gothic novel category of Gothic literature and has become a very popular mode of young adult fiction. While *Dracula* is the quintessential Gothic tale with many of the basic Gothic elements involved, *Twilight* takes a more modern twist on the Gothic tale and incorporates teen issues which turn it into a viable young adult novel. Students will learn, again, about the differences between a young adult novel and a canonical work when it comes to Gothic literature and how it has evolved through history. For this set of novels the activity will involve writing a series of letters between a character from each of the different books, *Dracula* and *Twilight*. These letters will demonstrate their grasp of the individual character traits and their grasp of the epistolary format of *Dracula*. It will also show that they understand how the Gothic genre has evolved and changed over time.

To break up the unit a little bit, the next work to extend the unit will be a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter." This story is a classic Gothic tale which

involves a young romance and the theme that is laced through the rest of the Gothic stories – the ambiguity of good and evil. The story tells of a girl who, while she says she is innocent and good, turns out to be physically poisonous to the man she falls in love with. This story also connects back to *Frankenstein* with the father of the young girl being a scientist and conducting experiments in his greenhouse. The supernatural elements are caused by this “mad scientist” persona in her father. This story is an excellent pairing both with the Gothic genre and with the canonical work *Frankenstein*.

As the next young adult Gothic novel to extend the unit, Margaret Stohl and Kami Garcia’s *Beautiful Creatures* is a perfect fit. This novel is in the Southern Gothic tradition and is written from a male perspective, an aspect that might draw in the male students in the class. This novel is very different from the other Gothic young adult and canonical works in the unit because it involves witches and ancestral curses more than vampires and eerie science. *Beautiful Creatures* is a smart addition to the unit because it really does *extend* the unit beyond the prototypical Gothic novel. Dealing with the issues of young love, trust and making tough choices, this novel integrates the supernatural elements well and also uses humor to its full potential. *Beautiful Creatures* details the story of a young man named Ethan Wate, who falls in love with a Caster girl named Lena Duchannes. Lena who will be Claimed for the Light or the Dark on her sixteenth birthday struggles with her affection for Ethan and with her family. An activity that would be fun with this novel would be to identify the Gothic character archetypes within the story because almost every single one is present. Students will be instructed to keep a chart to keep track of the different archetypes.

The final young adult novel that would extend the unit is *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare. This novel is, again, about the ambiguity that exists between good

and evil. In this novel it exists in the form of Shadowhunters, who hunt demons on earth. These hunters are, themselves, supernatural beings and are not human. This Gothic tale is very much a modern representation of Van Helsing from *Dracula*, as well. Van Helsing hunts Dracula, much as these Shadowhunters do. *City of Bones* is kind of a culmination of the unit and brings in almost every aspect of the Gothic literature genre.

The final project for the entire unit would be a debate on whether good can exist without evil. The students will be instructed to utilize any of the material from class or the readings they have done, including the character sketches, letter writing, and any outside research they have done. They will be encouraged to have specific quotes from the texts and examples. The debate will take place in a formal classroom setting with a required written component from each student. The hope is that students will learn how to debate formally, think critically about the topic and – most of all – have fun with the Gothic literature that they have read through the course of the unit.

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# GOTHIC LITERATURE UNIT

Presented By Jaclynn Landowski

# Why Teach Gothic Literature?

- Many underestimate its value
- Has its roots in history
- Reflects real life issues
- Makes reading fun

# Launching the Unit: Twilight Zone's "The Howling Man"

- ◎ Introduce students to Gothic elements in stories
  - Archetypes
  - Settings
  - Plots

# The Canonical Work: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

- Incorporates many of the Gothic elements
  - Doppelganger archetype
  - Ambiguous hero-villain archetype
- Themes
  - Morality of science
  - Ambiguity of good and evil

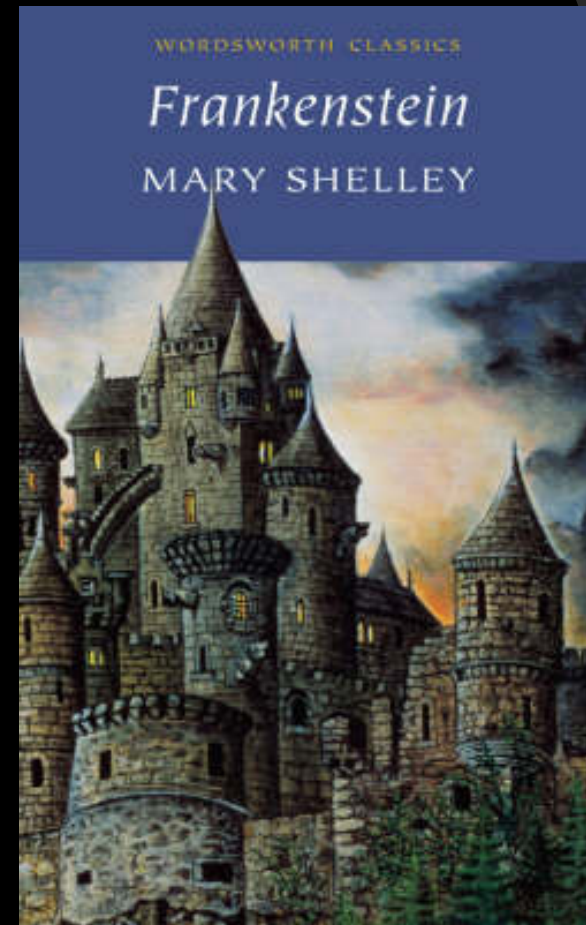


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# EXTENDING THE UNIT

Through Other Canonical Works and Young Adult  
Novels

# Pairing Canonical Works with Young Adult Literature

**Bram Stoker's *Dracula***

**Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight***

- ◉ Modern take on popularized vampire Gothic literature

**Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde***

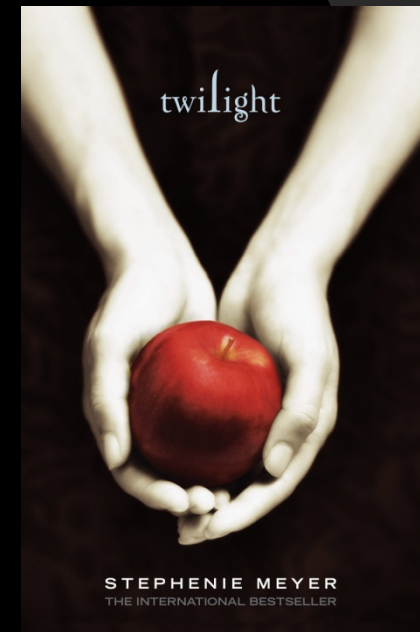
**The Nayeris' *Another Jekyll, Another Hyde***

- ◉ Modern take on canonical story
- ◉ Accessible to young adults

- Allows students to compare and contrast canonical works with young adult literature

# *Dracula* and *Twilight*: Letter Writing Activity

- ◉ Write a series of letters between two characters
  - One from *Twilight*, one from *Dracula*
- ◉ Demonstrate knowledge of:
  - Character traits
  - How Gothic genre has evolved



# Additional Works to Extend the Unit

- “Rappaccini’s Daughter” by Nathaniel Hawthorne
- *Beautiful Creatures* by Margaret Stohl and Kami Garcia
- *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare



# Can Good Exist Without Evil?

- ◎ Final project for the unit would be a debate over this question
- ◎ Students could use any and all material collected throughout the unit
  - Quotes
  - Letters written for activity
  - Any individual research – historical context
- ◎ Formal debate rules

# Can Good Exist Without Evil?

## ◎ Objectives

- Learn how to debate
- Learn literary analysis and how to support a theme
- Learn how Gothic literature is important in the canon and can relate to real life
- Have fun!