

Gothic Literature: Monster Stories Course Syllabus

What you will learn in this course

Gothic Literature: Monster Stories

From vampires to ghosts, these frightening stories have influenced fiction writers since the 18th century. This course will focus on the major themes found in Gothic literature and demonstrate how the core writing drivers produce, for the reader, a thrilling psychological environment. Terror versus horror, the influence of the supernatural, and descriptions of the difference between good and evil are just a few of the themes presented. By the time students have completed this course, they will have gained an understanding of and an appreciation for the complex nature of dark fiction.

Unit 1: GOTHICA: When Gruesome is Delicious

In this unit you will learn about the Gothic genre of literature. We will begin with a lesson about Gothic literature's place in history and society. Next we will discuss its major themes and the effect it is designed to have upon its audience. We will then look at the definitions of certain terms that are important to this genre. Lastly, we will examine various examples of works that fit this category, including both poetry and novels.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Discuss the definition and specific traits of Gothic literature.
- Discuss the social and historical factors that influenced the birth of this genre.
- Examine specific themes typically found in Gothic works.
- Identify key vocabulary terms related to Gothic literature.
- Discuss important works from this genre, which exemplify its themes and other traits.

Unit 2: FRANKENSTEIN: A Monster is Born

In this unit you will begin to study the novel *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley. We will start with some basic information about the author's life and times. We will look at important vocabulary terms, the key characters of this novel, and their relationships with one another. You will then read the first half of the novel itself and explore the themes that have emerged in those chapters.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Discuss Mary Shelley and the society in which she lived.
- Identify key vocabulary terms and characters from *Frankenstein*.
- Read and understand the Preface, letters, and chapters 1-12 of *Frankenstein*.
- Connect the novel with your own personal experiences and/or reactions to its themes.
- Determine which features of this novel make it fit the Gothic genre.

Unit 3: FRANKENSTEIN: With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility

It is now time to read the second half of the novel *Frankenstein*. We will examine some modern examples of science and culture that relate to *Frankenstein's* themes. In this unit you will again look at important vocabulary terms from this novel and related readings. A writing assignment will give you an opportunity to analyze and express your opinion on some of the information you have read in the lessons surrounding this novel.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Discuss scientific and medical issues related to the theme of “playing god.”
- Compare the poem “Prometheus” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to *Frankenstein*.
- Identify key vocabulary terms from *Frankenstein* and the related readings.
- Read and understand chapters 13-25 of *Frankenstein*.
- Connect the novel with our own personal experiences and/or reactions to its themes.

Unit 4: JEKYLL & HYDE: To Thine Ownself Be True

In this unit you will read the short novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. As with the previous novel, we will begin with basic information about the author's life and times. Next we will look at important vocabulary terms, the key characters of this novel, and their relationships with one another. You will then read the novel itself and begin to think about its themes.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Discuss Robert Louis Stevenson and his career as an author.
- Identify key vocabulary terms and characters from *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.
- Read and understand the ten chapters of the novel.
- List and describe the Gothic traits learned in Unit 1 that are found in this novel.
- Apply themes from *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to modern society or current events.

Gothic Literature Midterm Exam

- Review information acquired and mastered from this course up to this point.
- Take a course exam based on material from the first four units in this course (Note: You will be able to open this exam only one time.)

Unit 5: GOTHIC POETRY: Love From Beyond the Grave

So far you have been working hard on the two Gothic novels we have just finished studying. Let us now give our minds a bit of a break and examine some shorter pieces of material from...beyond the grave! We will begin with an eighteenth-century German ballad about a maiden and her absent lover. The lovers' theme will continue with a nineteenth-century English poem about a rather macabre way of expressing one's love. The last poem is from the early

twentieth century, also about a pair of lovers who become victims of tragic wartime circumstances. We will then look at the definitions of poetry terms that are exemplified in these works. Lastly, we will search for modern examples of stories, songs, etc., that remind us of events described in these poems’.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Identify key poetry vocabulary terms and locate examples of them in these poems.
- Read and analyze the 1773 ballad “Lenore” by German poet Gottfried August Bürger.
- Read and analyze the 1836 poem “Porphyria’s Lover” by Robert Browning.
- Read and analyze the 1906 poem “The Highwayman” by Alfred Noyes.
- Look for modern examples of other literary works such as songs, poems, stories, or films that are related to the poems in this unit.

Unit 6: DRACULA: The Blood is the Life

It is now time to begin your study of the novel *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker. You will first learn about Stoker’s life and literary connections. Then you will examine a list of important vocabulary terms and key characters. Next you will learn about some of the medical theories that were held by Victorian readers of this novel. You will then view a map and learn about the geography involved in the story. Lastly, you will read the first half of *Dracula* and respond to chapter study questions before finishing the rest of the novel in the next unit.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Discuss Bram Stoker.
- Identify key vocabulary terms and characters from *Dracula*.
- Discuss scientific and social issues of Victorian times that are present in this novel.
- Discover the geographical differences between nineteenth century Europe and modern Europe.
- Read and understand chapters 1-13 of *Dracula*.

Unit 7: DRACULA: The Hunter Becomes the Hunted

It is now time to read the second half of the novel *Dracula*. You will begin by previewing some of the vocabulary that appears in chapters 14 through 27. Next you will look deeper at two branches of social science that are prevalent in the novel. You will then read about the nighttime activities of the Dead in a poem by Goethe, whom you studied earlier in this course. In lesson four you will finish reading *Dracula* itself. This unit concludes with a creative assignment that combines your knowledge of vampires with your knowledge of physiognomy (which will be covered in lesson two).

What will you learn in this unit?

- Identify key vocabulary terms from *Dracula* and the related readings.
- Discuss physiognomy and phrenology and their influence in Bram Stoker’s writing.

- Read the poem “Totentanz” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and consider its use of vampiric themes.
- Read and understand chapters 14-27 of *Dracula*.
- Connect knowledge of Victorian sciences with knowledge of *Dracula* in a modern day practical situation.

Unit 8: EDGAR ALLAN POE: The Monsters In Us

This unit begins with an overview of the life of Edgar Allan Poe. Following that is a lesson containing important vocabulary words from two of his stories that you will read. You will next read two pieces of Poe’s horror fiction that employ dark Gothic features: “The Black Cat” and “Berenice.” The last section of this unit will allow you to choose one of three creative options to prove your familiarity with its content and story vocabulary.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Discuss the life of Edgar Allan Poe.
- Identify key vocabulary terms from the stories studied in this unit.
- Read and understand the short story “The Black Cat.”
- Read and understand the short story “Berenice.”
- Connect your knowledge of unit vocabulary creatively with Poe’s life and works.

Gothic Literature Final Exam

- Review information acquired and mastered from this course up to this point.
- Take a course exam based on material from units five to eight in this course – the last four units. (Note: You will be able to open this exam only one time.)