Han Le

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Dr. Warner

English 112B

Unit of Study: The Greatness of *Dracula* and Gothic Victorian Novel

**Rationale:**

Throughout the decades, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* has remained popular, as it has numerous film adaptations. The character, Count Dracula, has a huge influence on movies, songs, and literature who mostly portrayed as a villain. No matter how many vampire genres are released, Count Dracula never yields his spot as “The Most Influential Vampire” in popular culture. However, his popularity since the rise of the motion picture has its downside because the audience tends to focus more on Dracula as a monster of fear, horror, and humanity’s dark side. Meanwhile, they forget the significance of the novel, Dracula’s origin.

The purpose of this unit is to teach students to appreciate the novel, *Dracula,* and introduce to them to late Victorian Gothic genre through both American and English literature. Stoker’s *Dracula* does not only take many readers on a carriage ride of terror and fear, but it also reflects the culture of the Victorian society. It conveys many deep lessons about life, death, friendship, and the importance of unity. This book also vividly portrays the details of Victorian architecture and beauty of nature. *Dracula* is also an epistolary novel composed of letters, newspaper articles, and journal entries. This format offers students different perspectives from the characters, adds mystery, and creates more sense of credibility. Students also learn that there are many ways to write a novel besides a linear narrative.

Students learn about the characteristics of a Gothic novel by citing details that contribute to the essence of this genre and how the structure of an epistolary novel works. Students can understand the historic era of the characters through their attitudes and beliefs. Since this novel has many layers of meanings, students also decipher the information about the characters and events which are not stated explicitly in the text. Also, students will discuss about Count Dracula’s strengths and weaknesses which make him stand out in the popular culture. *Dracula* has strong writing style. Through examples in this novel, students can learn about many different literary devices, such as foreshadowing, simile, metaphor, allusion, personification, irony, and interference. I will provide them definitions, examples, and exercises before we discuss about these devices. The advanced text complexity of this novel prepares students to be more confident in tests, like SAT, ACT, or Advanced Placement exams. In the second semester, I will incorporate some YA works that share similar themes or setting with Dracula into my unit so that students can enjoy different genres and connect the contemporary works to the main text.

Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* meets the majority of the Exeter qualities. Ithas “an imaginative and well-structured plot” that “includes time shifts and different perspectives” (LfTYA9) because the audience learns the stories through the narratives of Jonathan Harker, Mina Harker, Abraham Van Helsing, and a narrative speaker. Its plot includes “secrecy, surprise, and tension” (LfTYA9). For instance, Jonathan's miraculous escape from Count Dracula’s castle is not explained until the middle of the novel because he is paralyzed with terror. Stoker’s characters “go beyond typical experiences,” and the language in this novel is “lively, varied, and imaginative...while being neither patronizing and simplistic nor unnecessarily confusing through the lexical density or complexity” (LfTYA9). The themes of this novel are rich and “allow possibility of emotional and intellectual growth” (LfTYA9). When I had finished with this novel, I learned more than I had anticipated from a horror novel. This book’s prominent themes include the importance of written communication and friendship, the intense fight between the goods and evils, the theme of redemption, and the rise of femininity in the Victorian era. Although *Dracula* fails the third quality, it meets the sixth quality closely. Of course, none of us are going to have a fight with a vampire anytime soon. The characters’ reaction towards their challenging issue—a powerful, vicious Count Dracula--is admirable because they are calm, resilient, and trust one another as though they are family members. They refuse to give up even though they fail numerous times in order to kill Count Dracula. Students can learn from the characters’ brave fight for peace.

**Launching the Unit:**

1/ Teaching the main texts:

First, I will introduce the history of Gothic movement. I am going to play a short movement from *Suite Gothique* named Toccatasby Léon Boëllmann because the music is an epitome of the Gothic genre. It is dark, spooky, and its melody sets the mood and the setting for the novel. The class will discuss the feelings that this piece of music evokes. Next, we will watch a video called *The Gothic* that filmed by Professor John Bowen in which he discusses the key motifs in Gothic novels, such as the uncanny, the sublime, and the supernatural. In this video, he uses *Dracula* to support his points.

Before we begin with the main text, the class will read and analyze “The Masque of the Red Death” by Edgar Allan Poe. This short story introduces students to the Gothic horror genre and gives them a better picture of the setting and plot. Also, the Red Death in this short work is similar to Count Dracula in some aspect. They both represents darkness and fear, and how no one can escape them. I will read the text out loud for my students and lead a discussion afterwards. We are going to go over the poem “The Raven”by Poe and do the same activities as we have done with the short story. Discussions will focus on the significance of the settings and symbols of the pieces. These two works by Poe help students get used to the horror language and reinforce their knowledge of Gothic characteristics.

Due to the advanced language in this novel, I would give students a list consisting about twelve words from the assigned chapters that might be unfamiliar to them. I would ask them to write the definition of the words, write how the words are used in the text, make their own sentences, and draw images that help them remember the words. Since students might have a hard time following through Stoker’s long sentences, I recommend they listen to the audio version by Christopher Lee along with reading the book.

Every day, in the beginning of class, I am going to give them a mini pop quiz composed of ten comprehensive questions from the assigned chapters. After the quiz, I will pick significant parts in the novel, draw students’ attention to them, explain the importance ideas that those passage convey, and guide the class through the discussion. We also look closely at the literary devices and analyze how they contribute to the main idea of the work. The first major essay is a creative essay in which students compose shorts horror stories, that they can write in diary or new articles forms.

When we finish with the novel, the entire class will discuss the themes of the novel in Socratic seminar. My questions that help their debates go to a meaningful direction include:

1/ What elements of Gothic genre are found in *Dracula?* Consider characters, conflicts, setting, symbols, and tone.

2/ Evaluate the effects that Dracula has on other characters he encounters in the novel. How does he bring out their best and most noble instincts? How does he bring out their worst or least desirable qualities?

3/ What does Dracula represent within the context of Stoker’s story?

4/ What is the significant of blood in *Dracula?* Explore the literal and symbolic meanings of blood in the story?

The purpose of this Socratic seminar is to prepare the students for their final, which is an in-class essay. I will give the students two prompts to choose and work on. Two of them are:

1/ Discuss *Dracula* in relation to modernity. Consider the novel’s attitudes toward scientific advancements?

2/ Analyze the importance of the narrative technique in *Dracula*. Using textual examples to explain how Stoker’s use of letters, journals, and diaries creates a sense of credibility, reinforces Gothic elements, and contributes to the meaning of the work.

In the second semester, students work in groups of two to three people. They are given a list of young adult novels that have themes or setting closely tied to *Dracula*. These books vary from contemporary realism to horror fiction because not all the students want to spend two semesters reading about vampires and paranormal events. The list composed of four categories—each represents a salient theme and characteristic in *Dracula*. Each group will pick two books this semester. Each time they finish a novel, they will write an essay compare and contrast what they have read to *Dracula*. For instance, they can explain how two novels deliver the same theme. Students are encouraged to go beyond the suggested theme since most of these YA works have more than one theme or characteristics similar to *Dracula*. In the final, each group of students choose the book from the YA list and make a trailer of the book. Students can either act in front of class or make a digital trailer.

**3/ List of Young Adults Novels:**

THEME OF COURAGE:

1/*After the First Death* byRobert Comier

Kate, a sixteen-year-old girl, takes over her sick uncle’s shift. He is a bus driver, so she has to drive a bus full of children to a summer camp. However, her bus is hijacked by four terrorists; one of them is as young as her. They force her to drive the bus to an old, worn-out railroad bridge and threaten to kill the children if their requests to the government are not fulfilled. Ben, a young son of a general who is responsible to save the children, steps up to help his father. This novel deals with courage and fear, which are two themes in *Dracula*.

*Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse

This epistolary novel is comprised of letters written by Rifka, a twelve-year-old girl, to her cousin. She and her family are fleeing from Russia to America. Along the way, they face many obstacles, such as brutal officers, hunger, theft, and cruel diseases. However, Rifka refuses to give in to her fate. She gets over her obstacles and grieves. She finds salvation in poetry and recognizes her skill of nursing people; she dedicates her time help people around her. Like the characters in *Dracula,* Rifka is courageous and does not hesitate to face her challenges.

*Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen

Brian Robeson is depressed over his parents’ divorce and his mother’s secret as he has seen her with a lover. He wants to keep the secret from his father. He decides to travel to Canada to visit his father via a private plane. Before he leaves, his mother gives him a hatchet, which he perceives as useless. His plan does not run smoothly; the pilot suffers a heart attack. Brian has no choice but land in the plane on a lake on a remote island. He is truly desolate and terrified. However, he fights his ways through the hardship, which is not easy for a city-boy like him. He gradually learns to survive in the wilderness and leaves behind the self-pity he has felt about his life as he develops the courage to stay alive.

THEME OF GOOD VS EVIL

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* by J.K Rowling

Harry Potter’s third year at Hogwarts is as not pleasant as he anticipated. A dangerous murderer, Sirius Black, has broken out of the formidable Azkaban prison, and it seems like he is seeking Potter. To ensure safety, Hogwarts is patrolled by the dementors, Azkaban guards that frighten Harry as they fill everyone with loneliness and despair. Despite any effort to protect Harry, fate drives Harry closer to Sirius, and reveals a truth. Gradually, Harry learns one important lesson, that things are often not what they seem. This theme is similar to *Dracula* because Johnathan is beguiled by Count Dracula’s amiable appearance. Other characters are fooled by Count Dracula’s disguise.

*Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya

Antonio Marez is six years old when Ultima enters his life in New Mexico. She is a curandera who heals with herbs and magic. Along Antonio’s growing-up journey, Ultima watches over him and graces him with courage and wisdom to face childhood bigotry, diabolical possession, his brother’s moral collapse, and violent deaths around him. She nurtures his soul and teaches him to distinguish between the good and the bad. This novel has many supernatural elements and suggests that the line between good and evil is extremely thin; therefore, one should look beyond appearances to make wise decisions.

*A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L’ Engel

Meg Murry’s father, who works on a government science project experimenting with fifth dimensional of time travels, disappears. One day, her family is disturbed by the arrival of an odd stranger named Mrs. Whatsit. Mrs. Whatsit’s arrival in Meg’s life allows her to learn about her fathers’ disappearance. Meg’ family and schoolmate, Calvin, travel through space to save her father from an interdimensional evil entity. This novel can be considered as cosmic horror, and the characters’ fights against evils bravely are similar to the characters’ goals to annihilate Count Dracula.

THEME OF FEMININITY

*Speak* by Laurie Anderson

Melinda is an outcast because she ruined an end-of-summer party by calling the cops. Everyone refuses talking to her, which hinders her from telling the truth of what really happened at the party. Her depression worsens day by day. However, she finds peace and feel free to express herself in Mr. Freeman art class; this class gives her the strength to heal her past wound, accept herself as she really is, and move on from the past. Similar to Mina in *Dracula*, Melinda is a strong young woman, and she is being targeted by a man who are more powerful than her.

*The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas

The protagonist, sixteen-year-old Starr Carter lives in two worlds—the poor neighborhood where she has grown up and the affluent, predominantly white private school she attends. She shows her courage as she witnesses her best friend, Khalil who is black, is shot by a police officer while Khalil is unarmed. His death becomes national headline which leads to many controversies. Starr decides to step in and become an advocate for injustice. Starr and Mina are two strong characters because they know to raise their voice against injustice and fight for the good cause.

YOUNG ADULTS HORROR NOVELS

*The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman

Nobody Owens, known as Bob, has his life threaten by a man named Jack who killed Bob’s parents. The safest place for him is a graveyard where he is protected by ghosts and a guardian who belongs to neither the world of the living nor the dead. In the graveyard, Jack has gone through many intoxicating yet dangerous adventures as he encounters an ancient Indigo Man or a strange and terrible Sleer. This novel has many characteristics of Gothic horror novel. The description of the graveyard has many details resembling the graveyard in the beginning of *Dracula*.

*Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs

Sixteen-year-old Jacob encounters a horrible family tragedy that leads him to journey to a remote island off the coast of Wales. When he arrives, he discovers an abandoned orphanage called Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children. As he explores the rooms in the orphanage, he discovers photographs of the children. These children seem dangerous, and Jacob starts to learn that they are sent to this remote island for good reasons. This fantasy novel has many horror characteristics for students to explore.

*Carpe Jugulum* by Terry Pratchett

King Reverence invites Uberwald’s undead, the Magpyrs, into his kingdom, Lancre, to celebrate his daughter’s birthday. The Magpyrs are modern vampires who love the sun, drink wine and eat garlics excessively. They take advantage of King Reverence’s goodwill as they refuse to leave his kingdom with the intention of taking Lancre. The only way to drive them out of his kingdom is unusual; he needs a nervous young priest and the argumentative local witches to ally and fight for their countries. If the students love *Dracula*, they surely enjoy this modern version of vampires.

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