

Stage 5 Unit starter

Ghost Stories

Rationale

A close analysis of Victorian ghost stories is the focus of this unit. As there are many ghost stories to choose from, freely available on the internet, a range of authors and styles can be used to help students identify the conventions of the genre and the specific features of the Victorian form. A brief history of the changes in society of the time, including technology advances, scientific thinking and increased levels of literacy, along with the rise of the magazine will help students contextualise the time period and better understand the factors influencing their creation and popularity. Whilst analysing the narrative form, links can be made to aspects such as the types of conflict found and the imagery and symbols used and how these link to the time period and English society. Comparing the original texts with modern adaptations is another way for students to explore the importance of audience, purpose and context on creating imaginative works. The changing nature of literary value can also be discussed in terms of the historical nature of the texts adding further worth to them in today's literary world, whilst there is still consideration of the difference between the mass produced clichéd stories and those deemed to excel in this form such as J.S. Le Fanu.

Outcomes

EN5-1A, EN5-2A, EN5-3B, EN5-4B, EN5-5C, EN5-6C, EN5-7D, EN5-8D, EN5-9E

Concept/s

Connotation, imagery and symbol: Students understand that attention to imagery can give rise to subtle and complex meanings. Students learn that

- the emphasis on imagery in a text varies according to its audience and purpose
- understanding the effect of imagery and symbol varies according to personal experience, social and cultural context
- attention to patterns of imagery invite readings that are more cohesive

Literary Value: Students understand that texts are valued within personal and cultural value systems and that these may change in different historical and cultural contexts. Students learn that

- texts have been valued for expressing views about the human condition
- textual patterning is aesthetically pleasing
- understanding of literary value may vary across time and culture
- texts that open up new ways of thinking about ideas and values are culturally significant.

Narrative: Students understand that narrative provides structures for expressing ideas and values. Students learn that

- stories represent broad aspects of humanity, society and culture, made particular and personal to interest the responder
- stories often revolve around complication or conflict (internal, between characters or of a character with society), which may rise to a climax before falling to a resolution.
- plot structures (chronological, flashback, 'in media res', circular etc.) can control responses to the story
- values are embedded in narratives through selection of details of events and characters and choice of language.

Exemplar texts

[The Tractate Middoth](#) by M.R. James, 1911

[The Tractate Middoth](#), written and directed by Mark Gatiss, BBC, 2013

[The Oxford Book of Victorian Ghost Stories – Introduction](#) by Michael Cox, R.A. Gilbert

[The Old Nurse's Story](#) by Elizabeth Gaskell, 1852

[An account of some strange disturbances in Aungier Street](#) by J. Sheridan Le Fanu, 1853

[The Signalman](#) by Charles Dickens, 1866



Focus questions for responding and composing

How do plot structures control responses in ghost stories and what were the defining features of the Victorian period?

How are the ideas and values of a society embedded in narratives and how are they used to engage responders?

What can an analysis of the use of imagery and symbol in texts tell us about the audience, purpose and context?

How has the literary value of ghost stories changed over time?

Prior knowledge

Short story conventions

Assessment

Students use the narrative conventions of the Victorian ghost story along with the values and ideas uncovered through their studies to create their own ghost story with a sustained voice and use of imagery, for a Victorian audience at Christmas time. **(Narrative, Connotation, imagery and symbol)**

Processes

Lessons and evidence of learning

Understanding

Students use a range of strategies to discriminate nuanced meaning. In their responding and composing they transfer their knowledge of texts to new contexts.





- Brainstorm with students elements of a good ghost story and then read/provide extracts or a summary of the key features of Victorian ghost stories according to the Introduction written by M. Cox and R.A. Gilbert. Create a checklist of the key ideas such as,
 - 'Each story should reveal to the reader a spectacle of the returning dead, or their agents, and their actions'
 - 'there must be a dramatic interaction between the living and the dead, more often than not with the intention of frightening or unsettling the reader...'
 - 'a definable Englishness about the story'
 - 'must be relatively short'
 - 'domestic in tone'/ 'everyday detail'
 - 'Inclined to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction'
 - 'contemporary settings...'
 - Often includes 'elements of the mystery story and tale of detection'

Provide students with a number of different stories to read and discuss in small groups. Complete the checklist and provide specific details from the text to support each check mark. Share findings with the class. Students write a short discussion on the ways in which their chosen ghost story represents the genre conventions of the form from the Victorian period and the appeal of the content and this author's style. **(Narrative)**

- Discuss the concept of literary value with students and ask them to rank ghost stories alongside other genres. What factors did they use to decide on the merit of the different genres? Further discuss the ways texts are valued within personal and cultural value systems and that they can change in different historical and cultural contexts. Ask students to fill in the Main idea mountain scaffold placing a view about the human condition or a new way of thinking about ideas and values at the top of the mountain, then identifying supporting evidence from the storyline in the next two boxes down and specific quotes or techniques in the final 4 boxes. Use this scaffold to support a written argument or discussion about the literary value of a given text. (A link to this graphic organiser can be found in Understanding graphic organisers downloadable on the English Textual Concepts website). **(Literary value)**



Processes	Lessons and evidence of learning
 <p>Engaging personally Students' responses to and composition of texts demonstrate a personal understanding of the world based on their own ideas, their experience of texts and their experience of life. They project an authentic voice through different types of texts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After reading several ghost stories discuss the types of conflict found in each. Ask students to find examples of internal conflict, conflict between characters or between a character and their society and discuss them as a class. Then ask students to answer the following questions, <i>Which type of conflict had the greatest impact on you in the stories? What impact did it have? Why do you think this is? What value does it add to a ghost story? Which type of conflict do you like to use most often in your own writing? Why do you think this is?</i> (Narrative) • Research and analyse a modern ghost story. Find the similarities and differences between the story and the Victorian stories studied in class. Combine class findings and identify the distinctive features of the contemporary ghost story. Then look at the ideas and values presented and what this says about our modern context and that specific to the author. Brainstorm with students the values and ideas they see in our current society or school or suburb and then write a contemporary ghost story embedding these values and ideas and their own experiences. (Connotation, imagery and symbol, Narrative)
 <p>Connecting Students appreciate the impact of texts on each other. In their responding and composing they use the connections between texts to come to new understandings about how ideas are reinterpreted in different contexts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <i>The Tractate Middoth</i> and then watch the 2014 BBC production available on YouTube. List the many differences between the two texts such as the ordering of events, the spider motif, change in the time periods, dialogue changes and consider the reasons for the changes made by the writer and director Mark Gatiss. Similarly, think about the omissions and additions made and what they say about the audiences of the early 1900s and today. For example, the TV adaptation includes reference to the twisted nature of the uncle which is absent in the original tale. This leaves a sense of apprehension at the end of the film unlike the short story. A doubt may be read into the short story as there is no logical reason given for the ghost helping the niece to own the estate, but the speedy denouement does not give rise to the same tension as found in the film version. Evaluate the impact of the different mediums used and how this contributes to expressing the values and ideas in the different centuries. Considering the context of each, ask students to make assertions about the literary value of each text. (Narrative, Connotation, imagery and symbol, Literary value) • Create plot line graphs for a number of ghost stories. On one side of the line note the story outline and on the other write structural features such as, new character introduced, conflict, flashback, imagery etc. Identify similarities and differences in the texts content and structure and come to a class agreement on a generic plotline for the genre. Students then identify which story strays furthest from the formula. What effect does this have on our enjoyment and appreciation of this story compared to the others? (Narrative, Connotation, imagery and symbol)

Processes

Lessons and evidence of learning

Engaging Critically

Through responding and composing students critically analyse and evaluate the ways in which texts represent different ideas and perspectives. They recognise the effect of context on meaning.

- Read *The Old Nurse's Story* by Elizabeth Gaskell. Make a table identifying the values, beliefs and assumptions in the text determining whether they are implicitly and/or explicitly presented and how they are influenced by both the text's purposes and intended audience. Then ask students to evaluate their incorporation in the text in representing aspects of humanity, society and culture and their value to us today. **(Narrative, Literary value)**

Name of text: <i>The Old Nurse's Story</i> Author: Elizabeth Gaskell Publication Date: 1852	Explicit or Inferred?	How is it influenced by the text's purpose?	How is it influenced by the text's intended audience?
Values 1. loyalty of nurses to children in their care 2...	Both	1. Building tension is important in the ghost story and is achieved through her fears for Miss Rosamond and retelling the events. Told from a trusted and faithful servant adds credibility to the story and the pretence of telling the tale to the child's now own children. 2.	1. The broad readership would find the working class narrator more believable and relatable adding an air of truth to the story. 2...
Beliefs 1... 2...			
Assumptions 1... 2...			

- Analyse the different narrators used across a number of texts. How have the values of the text been embedded through them? Look closely at their characterisation, dialogue, actions and the way voice has been used as a device in the text. Students write an essay evaluating the varied use of and effectiveness of narrative voice across the chosen texts. **(Narrative)**

Experimenting

Students compose critical and imaginative responses to texts. They adopt, combine and adapt conventions of genre and style to experiment with textual concepts and with ideas drawn from texts to come to deeper understandings.

- Assessment: Students use the narrative conventions of the Victorian ghost story along with the values and ideas uncovered through their studies to create their own ghost story with a sustained voice and use of imagery, for a Victorian audience at Christmas time. **(Narrative, Connotation, imagery and symbol)**
- In small groups, choose a favourite section from one of the ghost stories studied focussing on the atmosphere created through the imagery. Analyse the section and the features used to create the atmosphere in the written text. Then complete a planning sheet, deciding on how to recreate this section in a film, digital or audio text. Students then create the text and reflect on the effectiveness of their chosen techniques. **(Narrative, Connotation, imagery and symbol)**



Processes

Lessons and evidence of learning



Reflecting

Students broaden their understanding and use of metacognitive processes to choose and develop certain strategies appropriate for particular situations. They extend their range of reflective practices to consider how their own context influences the ways they respond, compose and learn.

- Reflect on their view of the literary value of ghost stories past and present and consider what informs their opinions. **(Literary value)**
- Have students complete the Weekly Learning Log throughout the unit. This organiser has table headings of 'The most important thing I learned this week was...', 'I was confused by...' and 'Next time I would like to ...' (A link to this graphic organiser can be found in the Reflection graphic organisers downloadable on the English Textual Concepts website). Ask students specific questions to guide their reflection further or allow them to complete it independently. At the end of the unit they can look back over their list and determine a statement that best represents their learning. Share these insights with the whole class and reflect on the differences and similarities in individual learning styles.



The intention of this unit starter is to illustrate teaching and learning activities for each of the processes.

The processes may be taught in any order to cater for the needs of all learners and further differentiation can be included in your full version of the unit.