

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for *Dracula* (Unabridged) by Bram Stoker

Book Information

Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Unabridged)

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363 Pages

Book Level: 6.6

Interest Level: UG

Vampires, werewolves, creatures dead and yet still living abound amidst people determined to eliminate them.

Topics: Adventure, Survival; Horror/Thriller, Vampires; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks

Main Characters

Arthur Holmwood (also known as Lord Godalming) the wealthy and noble fiancée of Lucy, who first enlists the help of Dr. Seward

Count Dracula the vampire inhabitant of Castle Dracula in Transylvania who journeys to England to inflict misery on its citizens

Dr. John Seward the physician and curator of a mental asylum whose help is requested in the matter of Lucy's mysterious illness

Jonathan Harker the clerk who is held prisoner at Castle Dracula when he journeys there to complete a real estate transaction

Lucy Westenra the sleepwalking fiancée of Arthur Holmwood, who becomes a vampire after a series of visits from the Count

Mina Murray the fiancée of Jonathan Harker, who is later forced to drink the Count's blood

Professor Abraham Van Helsing the learned physician from Amsterdam who recognizes Lucy's symptoms as those caused by vampire attack

Quincey Morris the wealthy American friend of Seward and Holmwood who helps kill Dracula

R. M. Renfield the patient at Dr. Seward's mental asylum who is loyally pledged to and controlled by the Count

Vocabulary

boyar a member of the privileged landholding class in Romania

caleche a light, two-wheeled, one-horse carriage for two passengers with a seat in front for the driver

nosferatu the name given the Un-Dead in Eastern Europe

physiognomist one who estimates character from the features of the face or the form of the body

polyglot a mixture or confusion of several languages

stertorous characterized by a harsh snoring or gasping sound

Synopsis

The story of *Dracula* is told almost exclusively by journal entries, with the exceptions of some letters and a few telegrams. The story starts with a journal entry by Jonathan Harker, a clerk for Mr. Peter Hawkins. He has been sent to Transylvania to meet with Count Dracula about some real estate he is purchasing in England. Jonathan gives many details about the scenery as well as the people and their customs. It appears they are very superstitious and are prone to crossing themselves and giving the evil eye when they learn of his intended destination. One kindly villager gives him a crucifix to wear. Later he is met by a mysterious coachman who drives him to Castle Dracula. There is an air of foreboding with wolves and darkness.

Jonathan takes notice of the Count's deathly pallor, long fingernails, sharp teeth, and fury palms. Things continue to become more suspicious. One day, Jonathan's crucifix saves him from the Count's bloodthirst when he cuts himself shaving. Jonathan soon realizes he is a prisoner in the castle. His attempts to escape and write letters home are always thwarted. Eventually, he discovers a way to gain entrance to the Count's bedroom and then the rest of the castle. It is in the lower levels of the castle that he encounters the Count's three concubines: voluptuous female vampires. He is

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saved from their attack by the Count, who means to feed on Jonathan himself. Jonathan plans to scale down the castle walls and escape; then his entries cease.

Correspondence between Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray reveal that the two are best friends. Mina plans to marry Jonathan, and Lucy will eventually wed Arthur Holmwood (Lord Godalming). Mina's worries about Jonathan increase as time goes by and she has heard little from him. Soon after, Mina receives a letter from a nun at a hospital in Buda-Pesth stating that Jonathan is ill and needs her there immediately. Once in Buda-Pesth, Mina and Jonathan are married. Meanwhile, a ship carrying boxes of earth, as well as the Count's body, is making its way for England. Concurrently, Lucy starts sleepwalking and becomes paler and weaker. Arthur calls in his friend Dr. Seward to assess his fiancée. Dumbfounded, Dr. Seward requests help from his friend and mentor, Professor Van Helsing. Van Helsing soon realizes that Lucy's problems directly stem from vampire bites and tries to save her with garlic and crucifixes. The Count, nevertheless, manages to get to her, and soon she is on her deathbed.

Van Helsing shocks Dr. Seward when he explains that Lucy's body must be mutilated. He poses his request to Arthur and friend Quincey Morris, who are doubtful. He offers to give them proof, which they find when they visit Lucy's tomb and discover she is missing. She returns shortly with a small child. Mortified, Arthur pounds a stake through her heart and Van Helsing severs her head. He explains to everyone what is happening, and plans are made to find Dracula and destroy him.

Meanwhile, Jonathan and Mina have returned to England. Van Helsing enlists their help, and Mina gladly offers it, typing a copy of Jonathan's detailed journal for him. It is decided that the Count's boxes of earth must be sterilized so he cannot return to them for sanctuary. Unfortunately, Mina begins to show signs of vampire attack -- paleness, lethargy, and loss of appetite. The Count's mindlink with Mina, however, is Van Helsing's asset -- he can

hypnotize her and locate the Count's whereabouts. Eventually, the Count flees to Transylvania, but Van Helsing and crew are one step ahead of him. They meet him on the road to his castle, overtake the band of gypsies transporting his body, and open his coffin. Quincey Morris, though mortally wounded in the skirmish, drives his knife through the Count's heart while Jonathan cuts off his head. The Count's body then turns to dust.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Van Helsing mentions that vampires, in spite of their enormous powers, are not free. Why not?

Students' answers should reflect the following quote: "He who is not of nature has yet to obey some of nature's laws. He cannot go wherever or whenever he pleases. He cannot enter a premise unless he is first invited. His powers cease or weaken at daylight. He can only travel over water at certain times. Also, he is forever on a quest for blood; without it, he will perish."

Literary Analysis

Why can this novel be classified as Gothic?

Dracula illustrates many of the conventions of a Gothic novel. For example, two of its protagonists are lovely young women who are pursued by an evil and darkly erotic villain. Also, the story takes place in a variety of ominous places: Castle Dracula, foreboding sea cliffs, dark chapels, and underground caverns. The weather is often dark and gloomy as well. There are also many horrific elements such as Un-Dead vampires who suck the blood from the living, people eating insects, and gruesome imagery. In the end, Mina is saved from "a fate worse than death" by a sexually non-threatening hero, and evil is ultimately destroyed.

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Inferential Comprehension

How can people's fascination with vampires be explained?

The interest seems to have many levels. One possible appeal is that, at one time, the vampire is human. Then, after death, he reanimates to become essentially immortal and very powerful. This may arouse humanity's natural curiosity and trepidation about what comes after death. Plus, many people like to be frightened. Such is the appeal of the amusement park ride.

Constructing Meaning

There tends to be a somewhat stereotypical view of women from the male characters in *Dracula*. Does Stoker seem to support this view as well?

It would seem not. Mina is perhaps the strongest character in the novel. It is her forethought that gives Van Helsing a copy of Jonathan's journal to aid him in destroying Dracula. She is the most altruistic character, for she pities Dracula and hopes his soul finds peace. Also it is Mina who concludes that Dracula is escaping by sea, and she is therefore essential to his destruction.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting In *Dracula*, Stoker describes the Transylvanian setting in great detail, from the Borgo Pass and the Carpathian mountains to the people's customs and beliefs. Actually, Stoker was greatly inspired and informed by the 1888 book *The Land Beyond The Forest* by Emily Gerard. In 1918, Transylvania became a part of the Romanian kingdom. The legendary castle Dracula, once inhabited by Vlad Tepes, or Dracula, is in the mountains near the present-day city of Bistrita. Have students locate other books giving information on historical Transylvania and modern day Romania and share any new and pertinent information contained in them.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Though Bram Stoker was inspired by Transylvanian myths as well as the historic Prince Dracula the Impaler,

the Transylvanians were not the first people to believe in the Un-Dead creatures. For many of the world's cultures, blood is a cornerstone in magic and superstition. One early reference to blood-sucking Un-Dead creatures is found on the art of a prehistoric Persian vase. The Babylonian myth of Lilitu is vampiric and known in Hebrew legends. Similar beliefs are also found in China, Africa, India, Malaysia, and Australia. The vampire proper comes from European belief, and the first use of the term vampire comes from Slavonia and in the Magyar form of "vampir." Have students trace the history of belief in vampires and construct a timeline or a map explaining their results.

Comparing and Contrasting Most of our perceptions of vampires come from movies we have seen. Dracula has been called the first authentic vampire, and he is definitely the most famous. Ask students to examine several films about vampires and/or Dracula. How are they different? How are they the same? Do they offer any new perspective or twist to the traditional vampire plot? Also, if the films are based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, how faithfully do they follow his novel? Some films to consider are: *Nosferatu* (1922), *Dracula* (1931), *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *The Lost Boys*, and *Interview with the Vampire*.

Describing Actions or Events Bram Stoker was inspired to create his character, Dracula, after learning of the real-life Dracula from professor Vambery of the University of Budapest. Prince Vlad Tepes ruled Wallachia from 1456 to 1462 and organized resistance against Turkish invaders. The prince's family name was Dracul, meaning "dragon." Dracula, therefore, meant "son of dragon." He was known for his insatiable appetite for violence. He frequently impaled not only his enemies, but his own subjects as well. Soon, the people began using the second meaning for dracul: devil. He died in a Turkish ambush and his head was sent to Mohammed II as a trophy. Have students research his notorious life as well as the mysterious disappearance of his corpse and write a short paper revealing their

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findings.